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Being Accepted for Who We Are: Evidence That Social Validation of the Intrinsic Self Reduces General Defensiveness

Jeff Schimel
University of Arizona

Jamie Arndt
University of Missouri—Columbia

Tom Pyszczynski
University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

Jeff Greenberg
University of Arizona

Three studies examined the possibility that being liked intrinsically by others—for who one is—reduces self-esteem defense, whereas being liked for what one has achieved does not. All 3 studies contrasted the effects on self-esteem defense of liking based on intrinsic or achievement-related aspects of self. Study 1 showed that thoughts of being liked intrinsically reduced defensive bias toward downward social comparison. Study 2 demonstrated that being liked for intrinsic aspects of self reduced participants' tendency to defensively distance themselves from a negatively portrayed other. Study 3 revealed that being liked for intrinsic aspects of self encouraged a preference for upward over downward counterfactuals for a negative event. In all 3 studies, similar reductions in defensiveness were not found when liking was based on achievements. Discussion focuses on implications for understanding the functional value of different bases of self-worth.

Most psychologists agree that self-esteem is a good thing; that high levels of self-esteem are associated with generally high levels of functioning; and that low levels of self-esteem are associated with many forms of psychopathology, psychological distress, and physical illness (for a review, see Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). However, it has also been suggested that high self-esteem can have a dark side, leading to self-deception, defensiveness, egocentrism, and perhaps even violence (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988). These conflicting views have led some theorists to suggest that the role of self-esteem in psychological functioning may be more complicated than current conceptualizations imply and that, consequently, additional refinements in theories of self-esteem are needed (cf. Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Crocker & Wolfe, in press; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Epstein & Morling, 1995; Greenier, Kernis, & Waschull, 1995; Pelham & Hetts, 1999). In a similar manner, we suggest that beyond the simple evaluative valence of one's self-evaluation, the nature of the sources from which one's self-worth is derived is a critical determinant of how self-esteem affects ongoing psychological processes. Of course, as many theorists have argued, social validation of positive attributes and achievements is an important contribution to feelings of self-worth (Allport, 1961; Becker, 1962; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Horney, 1937; Mead, 1964; Rogers, 1959; Sullivan, 1953). However, the nature of what positive aspects of self are validated may have different consequences for the individual's psychological functioning. In this article, we tested the hypothesis that social validation of intrinsic aspects of self—who one thinks one really is—reduces defensiveness whereas social validation of one's achievements—what one has accomplished—does not.

Different Sources of Self-Esteem

The idea that self-esteem differentially affects people depending on the sources from which it is derived is far from new. Humanistic and psychodynamic theorists have long argued for a distinction between secure, true self-esteem and insecure, defensive narcissism (e.g., Becker, 1962; Horney, 1937; Kohut, 1971; Rogers, 1959; Sullivan, 1953). Rogers was among the most influential theorists to advance this idea. He suggested that people who experience unconditional positive regard in their relationships with others develop a healthy self-structure and feel satisfied and confident in their value as persons. In contrast, people whose acceptance from others depends on meeting others' "conditions of worth" come to experience reality "secondhand," feel valuable only to the extent that they are living up to such standards, and are prone to defensiveness. A similar distinction is provided by Sullivan's conception of the "self-system." Sullivan argued that infants learn to internalize behaviors that elicit tenderness, praise, and emotional warmth as the "Good-Me" and to internalize behaviors that elicit anxiety and tension from the mothering parent as the "Bad-Me." From Sullivan's perspective, these personifications make up the self-system, which can become a stumbling block to personality growth by focusing the child on winning approval and

Jeff Schimel and Jeff Greenberg, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona; Jamie Arndt, Department of Psychology, University of Missouri—Columbia; Tom Pyszczynski, Department of Psychology, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jeff Schimel, Department of Psychology, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721. Electronic mail may be sent to jschimel@u.arizona.edu.

shutting him or her off to experience. In a related vein, Horney distinguished between "true self-esteem," which reflects genuine positive feelings about self, and "defensive self-esteem," which reflects deep feelings of insecurity about one's value that are masked by deceptively positive self-evaluations.

Recent social psychological theories of self also suggest that qualitative differences in self-esteem have implications for psychological functioning and well-being above and beyond the influence of quantitative differences in level of self-esteem. For example, Kernis and associates (e.g., Greenier et al., 1995; Kernis & Waschull, 1995) have argued that the extent to which people fluctuate in their level of self-esteem on a daily basis may be more indicative of psychological functioning than the overall level or evaluative valence of their self-esteem. They have shown that individuals with unstable high self-esteem are especially likely to exhibit defensive behaviors (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1992), inflated pride in accomplishments (Berry, Kernis, & Cornell, 1994), and anger and hostility (Kernis et al., 1989). For example, Kernis et al. (1992) showed that individuals with unstable high self-esteem were more likely than individuals with stable high self-esteem to self-handicap by emphasizing performance-inhibiting factors after success, thus implying that they did well in spite of hardship. A similar study found that compared with participants with stable high self-esteem, participants with unstable high self-esteem viewed positive evaluators as especially competent and likable and viewed negative evaluators as especially incompetent and unlikable (Kernis, Cornell, Sun, Berry, & Harlow, 1993). Kernis and associates (e.g., Greenier et al., 1995; Kernis & Waschull, 1995) suggested that unstable high self-esteem results from two factors: a high dependence on everyday outcomes for one's sense of self-worth and the possession of an underdeveloped or impoverished self-concept.

Crocker and Wolfe (in press) recently argued that variations in stability of self-esteem may reflect an underlying difference in the contingencies on which people base their self-esteem. They argued that the more one's self-esteem is based in a particular domain, the more one's self-esteem will be vulnerable to life events that occur in that self-esteem domain (see also Becker, 1962, 1973; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987a, 1992). They further suggested that consideration of self-esteem contingencies might shed light on sex and ethnic differences in self-esteem dynamics and may help resolve a wide range of long-running controversies within the self-esteem literature.

In a related vein, Deci and Ryan's (1991, 1995) self-determination theory suggests that true self-esteem is derived from aspects of self that either are intrinsic or have been thoroughly integrated with intrinsic aspects of self. Contingent self-esteem, in contrast, is derived from aspects of self that have been introjected, that is, taken in with minimal processing and not integrated with intrinsic or core aspects of self. Deci and Ryan contended that whereas true self-esteem entails a solid sense of self that is not constantly subjected to evaluation or scrutiny, contingent self-esteem requires ongoing assessments of the extent to which one is living up to external or introjected standards. They further argued that true self-esteem flourishes when "socializing agents are genuinely related to and autonomy-supportive of the target individual," which entails "valuing the other for who he or she is and taking that other's frame of reference" (Deci & Ryan, 1995, p. 46).

These theoretical perspectives converge in suggesting that the varying sources from which self-esteem can be derived might have different effects on the nature and quality of people's sense of personal value. Self-esteem that is derived from conditionally accepting relationships, living up to external standards of value, or a failure to fully integrate one's life experiences with internal representations of self produces a fragile, insecure sense of self-worth that requires constant monitoring, vigilance, and defense. In contrast, self-esteem that is based on more stable sources, such as unconditional relationships with autonomy-supportive others or validation of what one considers to be one's intrinsic self-attributes, may produce a more solid, secure sense of self-worth that does not require constant monitoring, validation, and approval from others. The primary purpose of the present research was to investigate whether social validation of intrinsic aspects of self, but not one's achievements, would reduce defensiveness.

Self-Esteem, Social Validation, and Defensiveness

The existing literature on the relationship between self-esteem and defensiveness is somewhat contradictory and almost exclusively correlational in nature. Whereas Taylor and Brown (1988; see also Abramson & Alloy, 1981) reviewed a large body of evidence suggesting that people with high self-esteem, low levels of depression, and other markers of psychological adjustment are especially prone to defensively distort their experiences to help them maintain their positive self-images, Randall and Block (1994) criticized Taylor and Brown's conclusions and provided evidence that defensiveness is not necessarily a hallmark of good mental health. Kernis and Waschull (1995) reviewed a similarly impressive body of evidence suggesting that people with stable high self-esteem are generally low in defensiveness and self-deception. Unfortunately, given the correlational nature of most of this research, it is impossible for one to know whether self-esteem is an antecedent or a consequence (or both) of defensive tendencies.

Evaluations from others are central determinants of self-esteem, both because we need feedback from others to ascertain the extent to which we are meeting the various contingencies on which our self-worth is based (e.g., Allport, 1961; Rogers, 1959) and because being valued by others is, in its own right, an important contingency from which self-esteem is derived (e.g., Rogers, 1959). Although there are a variety of explanations for how and why self-esteem is affected by interpersonal interactions (for contrasting views of this relationship, see Greenberg et al., 1986; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995), virtually all theories of self agree that such interactions have a powerful influence on self-esteem. Because of the critical role that others play in building and sustaining self-esteem, we used variations in the salience of past relationships and of social feedback in the laboratory to socially validate different positive aspects of self. Across the three studies, we examined the effects of these treatments on three different indices of psychological defensiveness. Specifically, Study 1 investigated the effect of priming previous relationships with conditionally or unconditionally accepting others, and Studies 2 and 3 investigated the effect of validation from another person in a current interaction based on either one's achievements or one's intrinsic self-attributes—who one feels one really is.

Study 1

To the extent that relationships with significant others are a major source of self-esteem, it follows that priming specific relationships with others should affect the basis of self-esteem that is operative at a given point in time. Contingent relationships, in which one feels accepted to the extent that one lives up to certain standards of value, may perpetuate the feeling that to maintain that feeling of acceptance and self-esteem, one must continually perform. According to this reasoning, self-esteem resulting from contingent relationships would be unstable because it is based on acceptance that could be withdrawn at any time depending on performance outcomes. In contrast, noncontingent relationships with others, in which one is accepted for one's intrinsic qualities, may perpetuate a more stable sense of self-worth. If one feels accepted for who one really is, then self-esteem derived from this acceptance should be stable and secure; whereas behaviors change, presumably "who one is" does not. This analysis therefore suggests that if contingent relationships with others are a less stable basis of self-esteem, then priming past relationships with demanding others should increase one's general level of defensiveness. However, if relationships involving noncontingent acceptance are more stable bases for self-esteem, then priming past relationships with unconditionally accepting others should reduce one's need to respond defensively. Study 1 was designed to test these hypotheses.

Baldwin and associates (for a review, see Baldwin, 1992) have demonstrated that priming specific relationships with others can have a dramatic effect on one's current sense of self-worth. For example, Baldwin, Carrel, and Lopez (1990) found that subliminally priming authority figures such as a graduate school mentor or the pope can lead to lower evaluations of one's research skills or morality, respectively. More recently, Baldwin and Sinclair (1996) showed that priming significant others whose approval is either contingent or noncontingent on meeting their standards can have a similar effect on self-esteem. Specifically, in Study 3 of that research, they found that relative to a noncontingently accepting other, leading people to visualize a contingently accepting other increased participants' sensitivity to associations between failure and rejection and success and acceptance, respectively. On the basis of these findings and two conceptually similar studies that used dispositional assessments of self-esteem, Baldwin and Sinclair argued that the perception of contingent acceptance leads to a more vulnerable and precarious sense of self-worth. We therefore adapted Baldwin and Sinclair's procedure for priming contingent and noncontingent relationships for use in Study 1, predicting that whereas priming contingent relationships would produce especially high levels of ego defense, priming noncontingent relationships would produce especially low levels of ego defense.

Because our interest was in comparing the effects of contingent versus noncontingent relationships with significant others on defensiveness in a current situation not directly related to the prior relationship, we chose to measure biased search for downward social comparison information after an ego-involving test as our dependent variable. Toward this end, we adapted a procedure developed by Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and LaPrelle (1985). With this method, after completing an ostensibly well-respected measure of social sensitivity, participants are shown the scored answer sheets of 6 other participants and are then allowed to inspect additional scored answer sheets from as many previous participants as they desire. To manipulate participants' expectations about what this additional information is likely to reveal, the original six answer sheets indicate scores either higher or lower than their own. Pyszczynski et al. (1985) demonstrated a consistent defensive bias in exposure to social comparison information in this paradigm, such that after failure, participants seek more additional social comparison information when they expect the information to suggest that most others scored poorly than when it suggests that most others scored well.

To test the present hypotheses, we primed participants with a contingently accepting other, a noncontingently accepting other, or a neutral person, and we then gave them a test of social sensitivity. After receiving an average score on the social sensitivity test, participants were led to believe that others performed either better or worse than they did. We predicted that whereas priming a contingent relationship would lead to an especially strong preference for additional information when participants expected that other students scored worse (vs. better) than they did, priming a noncontingent relationship would lead to a clear reduction in such defensive preferences.

Method

Participants. Eighty-four introductory psychology students at the University of Arizona participated in exchange for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 3 (relationship prime: contingent vs. noncontingent vs. neutral) × 2 (information expectancy: low scores vs. high scores) factorial design. Six participants were dropped because of suspicion about the social comparison procedures, leaving a total of 78 participants (36 men and 42 women).

Procedure. The procedure for assessing defensive downward social comparison was patterned closely after that used by Pyszczynski et al. (1985). After arrival at the laboratory, participants were informed that they would be taking part in a study comparing social sensitivity and social imaging ability among college students. Social sensitivity was described as "the ability to perceive other people's reactions to events, to know what they're thinking and feeling." Participants were told that they would first complete the Illinois Social Sensitivity Survey (ISSS) to provide us with a measure of their social sensitivity, and that later in the study, they would get feedback on their scores. The experimenter then explained that they would also complete an exercise on visualizing other people so that we could assess how social imaging is related to social sensitivity. After being introduced to the study, participants read and signed a consent form and went into private cubicles to complete the materials.

The ISSS was a bogus test based on social sensitivity tests used to provide performance feedback in previous research on self-serving attributional biases (Kuiper, 1978; Pyszczynski et al., 1985). It consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions in which participants were to indicate which of four words most other people would associate with a particular target word (e.g., *house*: *white, green, dog, bird*). Before ushering the participants into their private cubicles, the experimenter explained that the test was based on the word associations of more than 15,000 people. Moreover, they were told that people who do well on the test tend to have more successful social relationships of all kinds whereas those who do poorly on the test tend not to have successful relationships, probably because they are not very good at reading the thoughts and reactions of others. Participants were given a sample question to make sure they understood the procedure and then responded to the ISSS on a Scantron bubble sheet.

When participants finished the test, the experimenter handed them the visualization exercise in a blank envelope that had been prepared ahead of time by a different assistant. In this way, we were able to keep the experimenter naive as to participants' relational schema prime condition.

The visualization exercise was based on materials developed by Baldwin and Sinclair (1996) for their research on relational schemas underlying self-esteem differences. The first page of the exercise asked participants to write down the names or initials of people matching three descriptions—the first two of which were a famous person and the third was a casual acquaintance. Depending on participants' condition, the third description was intended to activate either a contingent relational schema or a noncontingent relational schema or to be neutral. For the contingent condition, the instructions read as follows:

> Think of a person who tends to be very evaluative of you, and seems to accept you only to the extent that you live up to certain standards of performance. Try to think of a person who best fits this description (whether from your current life or sometime in the past), and write this person's name or initials after "Person #3" above.

For the noncontingent condition, the instructions read as follows:

> Think of a person who tends to be very accepting and non-evaluative of you, and simply accepts you for who you are. Try to think of a person who best fits this description (whether from your current life or sometime in the past), and write this person's name or initials after "Person #3" above.

For the neutral condition, the instructions read as follows:

> Think of a person who is a co-worker or a classmate with whom you interact for business or academic purposes but rarely or never interact with socially. Try to think of a person who best fits this description (whether from your current life or sometime in the past), and write this person's name or initials after "Person #3" above.

On the next page of the exercise, participants were instructed to visualize the third person. On the basis of research by Baldwin and Sinclair (1996) and Baldwin and Holmes (1987), participants were asked, for example, to "see a picture of this person's face," "notice the color of their hair," and "imagine the person is here with you." To support the cover story that we were interested in how well people could visualize others, all participants then responded to three questions asking them to rate their visualization on clarity, ease, and realism. When participants finished the visualization exercise, they returned it to the blank envelope and placed the envelope in a box that contained other envelopes.

The experimenter then returned to the participant's cubicle with a scoring key and proceeded to score the participant's ISSS. Scores were indicated by writing a large 12 on top of the answer sheet, but individual items were not marked for correctness. The experimenter then returned the answer sheet, remarking, "Hmm, you got 12 out of 20 correct. That's not a great score but not too bad either." The experimenter mentioned that because participants were often curious about how others did, they could look through some answer sheets from previous participants who took part in the study. Participants were handed a folder that contained supposed answer sheets of 6 previous participants. As with the participant's own answer sheet, on each of the purported answer sheets, the person's score was marked on top, but the individual items were not marked for correctness. Thus, participants could not decipher which items were correct. The contents of the folder, which were prepared ahead of time by another assistant (thus keeping the experimenter naive to this manipulation as well), constituted the manipulation of information expectancy. In the high-scores condition, the participants inspected answer sheets with scores of 18, 16, 17, 8, 19, and 18 (M = 16); in the low-scores condition, the participants inspected answer sheets with scores of 6, 8, 7, 16, 5, and 6 (M = 8).

After participants inspected the answer sheets, they were told that although there was not much time left in the session, the experimenter had some things to take care of and while he was doing that, they could look through some of the 50 additional answer sheets that were available. The experimenter handed each participant a slip of paper on which he or she was to indicate how many answer sheets he or she would like to see, and then the experimenter left to attend to the other participants. When the experimenter returned to collect the participant's request form, he administered a questionnaire containing manipulation check questions that asked what score the participant obtained on the ISSS, how pleased the participant was with his or her score (responded to on a 9-point scale with 1 being the low anchor and 9 being the high anchor), and what the estimated average ISSS score of other students was. After completing this form, participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and thanked for their time.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks. On the direct check of outcome feedback on the ISSS, all participants correctly reported that they received a score of 12. A 3 (relational schema) × 2 (information expectancy) analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted on participants' estimates of the average score yielded only a main effect for information expectancy, $F(1, 77) = 79.54$, $p < .001$. Participants who saw other answer sheets with higher scores estimated higher average scores (M = 15.40) than did those who saw answer sheets with lower scores (M = 10.58). A 3 × 2 ANOVA conducted on how pleased participants were with their scores also yielded only a main effect for information expectancy, $F(1, 77) = 6.65$, $p < .02$. Participants who were led to believe that others had performed worse were more pleased than those who were led to believe that others had performed better (Ms = 5.53 and 4.43, respectively). This finding indicates that the information expectancy manipulation was successful.

One-way (relational schema) ANOVAs were also performed on the three questions that asked participants about the clarity, ease, and realism of their visualization. The one-way ANOVA performed on the clarity question produced no effect of treatment ($F < 1$). However, the one-way ANOVA performed on the "easy" question yielded a significant effect of treatment, $F(2, 77) = 3.13$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants rated their visualization task as easier when they were asked to visualize a contingently (M = 6.41) or noncontingently (M = 6.48) accepting other relative to a neutral (M = 5.91) other, both ts(77) > 2.01, ps < .05. ANOVA performed on the realism question also produced a significant effect of treatment, $F(2, 77) = 3.03$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that, relative to participants who were asked to visualize a neutral (M = 5.05) other, those who visualized a contingently (M = 5.59) accepting other rated their task as marginally more realistic, $t(77) = 1.56$, $p > .11$, and those who visualized a noncontingently (M = 5.90) accepting other rated their task as significantly more realistic, $t(77) = 2.46$, $p < .05$. Participants in the contingent and noncontingent visualization conditions did not differ ($t < 1$).

Information search. To investigate our central hypothesis that defensive social comparison processes would be strongest among participants primed with a contingent relational schema and weakest among participants primed with a noncontingent relational schema, we subjected the number of additional answer sheets requested to a 3 (relational schema) × 2 (information expectancy)

ANOVA.[1] Results of this analysis revealed a marginal effect for information expectancy, $F(1, 77) = 3.46$, $p < .07$, which was qualified by the predicted two-way interaction, $F(2, 77) = 5.76$, $p < .01$. The pattern of means for this interaction, presented in Table 1, conformed to our predictions.

In the neutral prime condition, participants tended to request more answer sheets when they were led to believe that others had done worse than when they were led to believe that others had done better, although this difference was not significant ($t < 1$). When participants were primed with a contingent relational schema, however, a pattern of downward social comparison emerged quite strongly. Participants requested more answer sheets when they were led to believe that others had performed worse than when they were led to believe that others had performed better, $t(77) = 3.59$, $p < .01$. In contrast, priming a noncontingent relational schema eliminated, and even slightly reversed, this effect. Looked at differently, participants in the contingent relational prime condition requested to see more social comparison information than did participants in both the noncontingent and neutral relationship conditions, both $ts(77) > 2.05$, $ps < .05$, when they expected the information to reveal that most others performed worse than they did, but they did not differ from participants in the other conditions when they expected the information to reveal that most others performed better than they did ($ts < 1.6$).

Study 1 demonstrated that priming a contingent relationship clearly increased participants' tendency to seek social comparison information in a selective and defensive manner. Whereas participants who were primed with a contingent relationship showed significantly more interest in social comparison information when they expected that most others performed worse (vs. better) than they did, this effect was completely eliminated and even slightly reversed for participants who were primed with a noncontingent relationship. These data provide initial support for our proposition regarding the effect of type of social validation on defensiveness: Unconditional relationships in which people are accepted intrinsically—for who they are—lead to less defensiveness than conditional, evaluative relationships.

Note that although a strong pattern of preference for downward social comparison information emerged when a contingent relationship was primed, unlike in previous research (Pyszczynski et al., 1985), only a weak, nonsignificant bias of this form was found in the neutral-relationship control condition. There seem to be two plausible explanations for this finding. The first is that the neutral visualization task may have distracted participants from the evaluative context of this study, reducing the evaluative nature of this condition below the typical level found in downward social comparison studies. The other plausible explanation for the weaker pattern found in the control condition is based on the relatively ambiguous neutral feedback that participants were given about the meaning of their performance ("not a great score but not too bad either"). The previous studies that demonstrated a strong downward comparison bias in the absence of any type of relational prime found such bias only among participants who were given clear and unambiguous failure feedback, which, of course, would be more ego-threatening than that used in the present research. On the basis of this reasoning, it may be that when ego threat is high, as in the case of participants given clear failure feedback in past studies, defensive social comparison tendencies emerge whether or not demanding prior relationships have been activated. In less threatening conditions such as those used in Study 1, this defensive bias may emerge only when participants are in an especially self-evaluative defensive state due to the priming of past contingent relationships.

Table 1
Means for the Interaction of Relational Schema by Informational Expectancy on Amount of Social Comparison Information Requested: Study 1

	Relational schema		
Information expectancy	Noncontingent	Neutral	Contingent
High scores			
M	6.36_a (5.21)	4.70_a (5.17)	3.44_a (4.24)
n	14	10	16
Low scores			
M	4.27_a (4.89)	6.17_a (5.98)	10.45_b (4.48)
n	15	12	11

Note. Higher values reflect a higher amount of social comparison information requested. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

Whereas Study 1 demonstrated the effect of prior contingent and noncontingent relationships on psychological defensiveness in new situations, current ongoing interactions with others are also a potent source of self-esteem. To the extent that current self-esteem is influenced by feedback from one's interaction partners, our reasoning implies that the effects of such feedback on later defensiveness depend on whether it is focused on intrinsic attributes of self or more extrinsic aspects of self such as achievements and accomplishments. This reasoning suggests that being accepted by others for intrinsic qualities should reduce defensiveness but being accepted by others for one's achievements and accomplishments or for characteristics unrelated to oneself should not.

Study 2

To more directly test this hypothesis, in Study 2 we investigated the effect of approval after participants revealed different aspects of self to others on psychological defensiveness in a situation unrelated to the interaction. Because interactions with others exert an important influence on self-esteem, we predicted that others' reactions to one's self-attributes would significantly affect the psychological consequences of such disclosures. To investigate these issues, we compared the effects of providing participants with positive feedback for revealing intrinsic self-attributes, achievement-related self-attributes, or attributes that were unrelated to their self-concepts. We hypothesized that whereas revealing intrinsic self-attributes would reduce defensiveness, revealing information about one's achievements or false information about the self would not.

[1] Initial analyses in this study and the subsequent two studies included sex of participant as a variable but, with one exception, found no main or interaction effects. In Study 2, there was a main effect for sex on state self-esteem, such that men were higher than women ($p < .02$). Because this sex effect did not interact with the independent variables of theoretical interest and because there were no effects involving condition in any of the studies, sex is not discussed further.

But why might social validation for one's intrinsic self reduce defensive reactions? Social validation for disclosing different self-attributes may affect the stable versus unstable basis of people's current feelings of self-worth. Andersen and Ross (1984) showed that people deem their subjective inner thoughts and feelings as more indicative of their true selves than their overt behaviors. One implication of this finding is that if people deem their subjective inner qualities as more closely tied to their true self than aspects of self that reflect their behaviors, then acceptance for people's positive inner qualities (vs. their positive behaviors) might increase the stability of their sense of acceptance. Thus, we would argue that if people feel socially accepted for revealing what they consider to be their true selves, then their current feelings of self-esteem should be based on a stable sense of acceptance that is unlikely to change or fade depending on situational outcomes or performance. However, being accepted for revealing one's achievements or for revealing false attributes should create a less stable basis of self-worth because people's sense of acceptance would hinge on living up to achievement standards or having qualities that they do not really possess. In either case, the current basis of their self-worth would be unstable and lead to an increase in vigilance and defensiveness to protect their fragile feelings of self-worth. Finally, we reasoned that people's current basis of self-esteem would also become unstable if they revealed inner intrinsic aspects of self and did not receive social validation for such disclosures. If an individual possesses a stable, unchanging aspect of self and is unsure of whether other people value that quality, then the basis of the individual's self-esteem would be on shaky ground until that aspect of self is socially validated. Thus, without the assurance that one's self-attributes are valued by others, revealing intrinsic aspects of self with the knowledge that such self-attributes will be scrutinized by others might lead to especially high levels of defensiveness.

To enhance the generality of our findings, in Study 2 we sought another measure of general defensiveness, preferably one that was likely to show defensive patterns of responding even under control conditions. Several studies have demonstrated that judgments of similarity to others can be a useful way to measure general defensive reactions. For example, studies have shown that people seek to maximize their similarity to attractive or likable people and to minimize their similarity to unattractive others (Byrne & Blaylock, 1963; Granberg & King, 1980; Marks & Miller, 1982; Marks, Miller, & Maruyama, 1981), presumably because doing so maximizes the self-esteem that such perceptions of similarity provide. In a related vein, research has shown that people reduce their perceptions of similarity (i.e., closeness) to others who outperform them on ego-relevant dimensions (for a review, see Tesser, 1988). People have also been shown to increase their perceptions of dissimilarity to others who portray negative qualities that they fear in themselves, such as susceptibility to cancer (Pyszczynski et al., 1995; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Sideris, & Stubing, 1993) and violence or dishonesty (Schimel, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, O'Mahen, & Arndt, 2000). If judgments of similarity to others are prone to such motivated biases, then judgments of similarity to those who are failures, social outcasts, or moral transgressors should also reflect such biases, and these biases should be affected by factors that influence the individual's momentary basis of positive self-feelings.

To test this line of reasoning, we asked participants to write a short self-descriptive essay, and we told them that another student would read their self-description and give them feedback. In these self-descriptive essays, students were asked to write about (a) their true inner qualities, (b) themselves in a positive manner concerning their accomplishments and achievements, or (c) another person's qualities as if those qualities were their own. After writing their essay, participants either did not receive feedback or received positive feedback indicating that another student in the experiment liked them and wanted to meet them. As a measure of defensive distancing, participants then rated their similarity to another student who was portrayed as "clingy," "depressed," and unable to get over a bad relationship. Participants also filled out a measure of state self-esteem.

If acceptance from others for revealing intrinsic self-attributes produces a stable, secure basis of self-esteem, then participants who received positive feedback for describing their true selves should show less defensive distancing from the target person than participants who received positive feedback for describing their achievements or participants who pretended to be someone else. Similarly, if disclosing intrinsic self-attributes in the absence of social validation makes people feel especially vulnerable, then participants who received no feedback after revealing their true selves should increase distancing from the target person compared with participants who received no feedback and described their achievements or pretended to be someone else. We also assessed whether participants in the positive-feedback conditions would experience an increase in self-esteem. If social validation for different aspects of self shifts the basis of people's self-esteem without affecting the level of their self-esteem, then we would expect no differences in state self-esteem between the self-description conditions in response to feedback.

Method

Participants. Ninety introductory psychology students (22 men and 68 women) at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs received course credit as incentive to participate. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 3 (self-description: intrinsic vs. achievement vs. false) × 2 (feedback: positive vs. none) factorial design and were then tested individually or in groups of 2 or 3.

Procedure. The experimenter began each session by telling participants that the study concerned how people use information to form impressions and get acquainted with each other. Participants were informed that, to examine this process, they would write a short description of themselves and then give this description to a student in the next room to read. The experimenter also noted that the student in the next room would respond to a short page of questions about this description and that the participant would be able to examine the student's responses. Then, at the end of the experiment, the participant would spend some time getting acquainted with the other student. Participants were also told that a second purpose of the study was to look at the getting-acquainted process from the participants' own perspectives. The experimenter explained that to do this, participants would be asked to look over some personality information about another student (the target person) and then answer some questions about that person. Participants were then asked to write their self-descriptions.

The type of self-description that participants were asked to write comprised the manipulation of intrinsic self versus achieving self versus false self. These instructions were prepared by another assistant prior to the experimental sessions and were delivered to the participants by the experimenter in a blank envelope, thus keeping the experimenter naive to the

participants' self-description condition. The instructions for participants in the intrinsic-self condition read as follows:

> In today's study we would like you to write a short description of yourself. In your self-description, describe in detail at least two qualities that most reveal who you are as a person (e.g., values, hobbies, or personality characteristics). Under each heading, describe one of your personal qualities and how this quality reflects your true self. Sometimes in this exercise people feel like they need to put their best foot forward, or make a good impression. In this self-description, however, we would like you to focus on whatever is most revealing of your true inner qualities. If it helps, pretend as if you are writing about yourself in a journal or diary.

The instructions for participants in the achieving-self condition read as follows:

> In today's study we would like you to write about your accomplishments and achievements. Think of at least two achievements that reveal how competent and talented you are (e.g., good grades, winning an award, or getting promoted at work). Under each heading, describe what you have achieved and how this accomplishment reflects your competence and success as a person. If it helps, pretend as if you are applying for an important job and you are trying to put your best foot forward to make a good impression.

The instructions for participants in the false-self condition read as follows:

> In today's study, we would like you to think of someone that you admire and respect and then pretend that you are that person. Once you have thought of someone, think of two qualities or characteristics that define the person you are thinking of and then describe yourself as having those qualities below. The qualities that you pretend to have should be qualities that are characteristics of the person you are pretending to be, but not characteristic of yourself. The person you choose could be a friend, an acquaintance, a relative, or even someone on television. If it helps, think of yourself as an actor or actress who is playing a role.

As soon as participants in the positive-feedback conditions finished writing their self-descriptive essays, the experimenter collected the essays and left to ostensibly let the other student read them. In the no-feedback condition, the experimenter did not collect their self-descriptions and explained to the participants that the other student would read their self-descriptions later in the experiment.

For participants in the positive-feedback conditions, the experimenter explained that it might take several minutes for the other student to read the essay and instructed participants to wait until he returned. After about 5 min, the experimenter returned with an envelope and gave it to the participants. Inside the envelope was a form with three questions about how much the other student liked the participant and one question about the evaluator's certainty of his or her ratings. All participants in the positive-feedback condition received the same constellation of ratings (between 18 and 20) for the likability questions on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 20 (*very much*). On the certainty question, participants always received a score of 20, indicating that the evaluator was very certain of his or her responses. There was also a comments section at the bottom of the evaluation with the following remarks:

> It's hard to tell from what people write, but based on what this person wrote and the kinds of things he/she described, this person seems like someone I would like to get to know and be friends with.

The experimenter then proceeded by having participants in the positive-feedback and no-feedback conditions fill out the short form of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

After participants completed the PANAS, the experimenter explained to participants that the second part of the experiment would require them to read about another student, not the same one who did (or would) provide feedback on their self-description, and answer some questions about that person. These procedures followed those used by Pyszczynski et al. (1993, 1995; Schimel et al., 2000) to assess distancing from a person with a feared negative trait, which constituted our measure of general defensiveness. Participants received a packet that contained some demographic information about the target person, a self-written description of something that recently happened to the person, and a personality inventory of the target person. The purpose of including the demographic information was to set up an illusion of basic similarity to the target person, which was necessary to motivate defensive distancing. The demographic page presented the target person as a student at the participant's university who was roughly the same age, class standing, and sex as the participant.

The next piece of information in the packet was a handwritten description of an emotional situation in which the person was recently involved. This description was meant to depict the target person in a negative way so as to set up the measure of defensive distancing from the target person that would follow. In this description, the target person revealed that he or she was clingy and dependent in relationships, was cheated on by his or her partner, was recently dumped by his or her partner, and was depressed. The next part of the packet contained a bogus personality inventory of the target person, as was used by Pyszczynski et al. (1993, 1995; Schimel et al., 2000). On this form, the target person was rated on 20 different personality traits chosen from Alicke's (1985) list of 362 trait adjectives that had previously been rated for desirability. The target person received a score on a scale from 0 to 100 for each separate trait. This score was indicated by a vertical line on the scale and was printed in boldface type. Printed below each line was the numerical score for that trait. As in previous studies, the personality inventory consisted of 10 moderately desirable traits (e.g., self-satisfied, witty, bold) and 10 moderately undesirable traits (e.g., restless, boastful, clumsy).[2] Using only moderately desirable or undesirable traits made it feasible for participants to distance themselves from the target in either direction without having a major impact on their self-esteem. To make it easier for participants to distance themselves in either direction, the target person was always portrayed as falling between the 50th and 75th percentile on positive traits and between the 25th and 50th percentile on negative traits. The same arbitrarily constructed personality inventory (within the aforementioned guidelines) was used for all participants.

Participants were given as much time as they needed to read through the packet of information on the target person. When they were finished, the experimenter began frantically shuffling through some papers. After about 1 min, the experimenter turned to the participants and explained that the next part of the experiment involved filling out a short personality form but that the form appeared to be missing. The experimenter asked participants to wait there while he left to find some extra forms in his office. After about 3 min, the experimenter returned and said that he was unable to find the appropriate form. The experimenter then informed participants that the personality form that they were supposed to fill out simply asked them to rate themselves on the same 20 traits on which the target person was rated. Thus, as a solution to the current dilemma, the experimenter instructed participants to use the target person's personality inventory as their own form. The participants were instructed to simply circle a point on

[2] The 10 moderately desirable traits that were used on the distancing measure were witty, bold, neat, self-satisfied, philosophical, meticulous, prudent, obedient, reserved, and progressive. The 10 moderately undesirable traits were clumsy, restless, tiresome, extravagant, overcautious, unpoised, boastful, strict, conforming, and forgetful.

the scale beside each trait, indicating how well each trait described them. This ploy enabled us to keep the target person's ratings on the various traits salient while participants made their self-ratings. Participants' self-ratings on these traits were used to construct a composite measure of distancing from the target person.

In the final part of the study, as manipulation checks, participants filled out a form containing questions about themselves, the target person, and the experiment. The first part of this packet contained Heatherton and Polivy's (1991) measure of state self-esteem. The next page consisted of two specific questions that asked participants to rate the target person. To check the effectiveness of the negative depiction of the target person, participants were first asked, "How much would you like to meet someone like this?" As a direct measure of similarity, participants were then asked, "How similar do you see yourself to this person?" A second series of questions pertained to the self-descriptive essays that participants wrote. Two questions asked participants how much their essay reflected who they really are as a person and how much the essay reflected how competent they are. Participants in the positive-feedback condition were given an additional form. Two questions on this form pertained to how much participants felt that their evaluator truly liked them and how much they felt like they would have to perform to be friends with this person. The last two questions on this form asked participants how much they would like to get to know their evaluator and how likable their evaluator was. All scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*), with higher ratings reflecting positive responses to the particular items. After all participants had completed this last series of questions, they were thoroughly debriefed, given credit, and dismissed.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks. We performed separate 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVAs on the single-item measures of the extent to which participants' self-descriptions reflected their true self and their competence. The true-self question revealed a significant main effect of self-description, $F(2, 84) = 16.05$, $p < .001$, that was qualified by a significant Self-Description × Feedback interaction, $F(2, 84) = 3.33$, $p < .05$. Relevant means are displayed in Table 2. Pairwise comparisons among no-feedback participants revealed that intrinsic-self participants reported that their essays were more indicative of their true selves than achievement participants and false-self participants, both ts(84) > 3.97, ps < .001, but that achievement and false-self participants did not differ from each other in this regard ($t < 1$). This finding suggests that the type of self-description manipulation was successful. Pairwise comparisons among positive-feedback participants revealed that participants in both intrinsic-self and achievement conditions reported that their essays were more indicative of their true selves than participants in the false-self condition, both ts(84) > 3.24, ps < .01, and that intrinsic-self and achievement participants did not differ from each other ($t < 1$). Looked at differently, whereas participants in the achievement condition reported that their self-descriptions were more indicative of their true selves when they received positive feedback than when they received no feedback, $t(84) = 2.70$, $p < .01$, there was no effect of feedback for participants in the intrinsic-self or the false-self condition (both ts < 1). Thus, it appears that participants who described their achievements viewed these self-descriptions as more central to their self-concepts only when they received positive feedback.

A similar 3 × 2 ANOVA performed on participants' ratings of how much their essays reflected their competence revealed a main effect of self-description, $F(2, 84) = 7.04$, $p < .001$, that was also qualified by a significant Self-Description × Feedback interaction, $F(1, 84) = 3.57$, $p < .03$ (see Table 2 for cell means). Pairwise comparisons among the no-feedback conditions revealed that achievement participants were more likely to report that their essays were indicative of their competence than intrinsic-self participants, $t(84) = 2.19$, $p < .05$. Pairwise comparisons among positive-feedback participants revealed that those in the achievement condition reported that their essays were more indicative of their competence than both those in the intrinsic-self condition and those in the false-self condition, both ts(84) > 2.43, ps < .02, who in turn did not differ. Thus, the achievement self-description was clearly perceived as portraying participants' competence, although this effect was influenced by the feedback that participants received from their partners. Pairwise comparisons revealed a tendency for achievement/positive-feedback participants to report that their essays were more indicative of their competence than achievement/no-feedback participants, although this difference was only marginal, $t(1, 84) = 1.68$, $p < .09$. There was no effect of feedback for participants in the intrinsic-self or the false-self condition (both ts < 1.3).

One-way (self-description) ANOVAs performed on the four single-item measures of reactions to the feedback that were asked only to participants who received positive feedback revealed no significant effects. The fact that mean scores on these items ranged

Table 2
Means for the Interaction of Self-Description by Feedback on Defensive Distancing and Other Measures: Study 2

	Intrinsic self		Achievement self		False self	
Dependent variable	Positive feedback (n = 15)	No feedback (n = 16)	Positive feedback (n = 15)	No feedback (n = 16)	Positive feedback (n = 14)	No feedback (n = 15)
Essay reflects true self	7.47_{a} (1.55)	7.94_{a} (1.34)	7.20_{a} (2.21)	5.40_{b} (2.10)	5.00_{b} (2.08)	5.07_{b} (1.53)
Essay reflects competent self	$6.00_{a,c}$ (1.73)	$5.13_{a,d}$ (1.41)	7.53_{b} (1.80)	$6.47_{b,c}$ (1.64)	$5.07_{a,d}$ (1.73)	$6.13_{a,c}$ (1.90)
Distancing composite	14.68_{a} (3.19)	19.62_{b} (4.24)	$16.97_{a,b}$ (3.82)	$17.23_{a,b}$ (4.09)	16.63_{a} (4.32)	16.86_{a} (3.45)
Direct similarity	$3.40_{a,b,d}$ (2.26)	$2.88_{b,d}$ (1.82)	4.73_{a} (3.28)	$4.20_{a,b,d}$ (2.27)	$2.93_{b,c}$ (1.82)	$4.47_{a,c}$ (2.17)
Positive affect	$35.73_{a,b}$ (3.60)	$36.71_{a,b}$ (7.04)	$38.00_{a,b}$ (6.02)	29.27_{c} (6.10)	$34.79_{b,d}$ (6.24)	$31.33_{c,d}$ (4.75)
Negative affect	12.64_{a} (2.92)	17.86_{b} (6.99)	13.29_{a} (4.01)	13.47_{a} (4.64)	12.79_{a} (5.75)	11.93_{a} (2.25)

Note. Attributions of the target and self-description essays were assessed on 9-point scales (ranging from 1 to 9). Composite distancing scores represent the sum of the absolute value of the differences between the participants' and target's ratings on the 20 traits divided by the number of traits; thus, higher values reflect greater distancing. Composite negative affect and positive affect scores were made on 5-point scales (ranging from 1 to 5); higher values reflect higher affect. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

from 7.19 to 7.70 on a 9-point scale suggests that, as intended, positive-feedback participants generally thought their interaction partners had formed positive impressions of them.

Defensive distancing. As in previous studies that used this measure (e.g., Pyszczynski et al., 1993, 1995; Schimel et al., 2000), a composite measure of defensive distancing from the target person was formed by taking the average of the absolute value of the difference between participants' ratings and the target's ratings. Higher numbers therefore reflect greater distancing. A 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA on this distancing composite revealed a main effect of feedback, $F(1, 84) = 4.91$, $p < .03$, that was qualified by the predicted interaction, $F(1, 84) = 3.74$, $p < .05$. Relevant means are displayed in Table 2.[3] Pairwise comparisons revealed that positive feedback reduced defensive distancing among intrinsic-self participants, $t(84) = 12.62$, $p < .001$. However, there was no effect of feedback on distancing among achievement or false-self participants (both $ts < 1$). Pairwise comparisons also revealed trends suggesting that, after receiving positive feedback, intrinsic-self participants distanced less than achievement participants, $t(84) = 1.79$, $p < .10$, and false-self participants, $t(84) = 1.38$, $p < .20$. Pairwise comparisons in the no-feedback conditions indicated that intrinsic-self participants distanced more than false-self participants, $t(84) = 2.00$, $p < .05$, and tended to distance more than achievement participants, $t(84) = 1.60$, $p < .12$. Of course, these pairwise comparisons must be interpreted with caution because they only approached significance.[4]

An alternative explanation for why participants distanced from the target person is that they were simply rating themselves higher on the positive traits and lower on the negative traits than the target. Thus, distancing from the target may reflect a general tendency for participants to inflate their self-esteem by positively rating themselves relative to the target. To test this alternative explanation, participants' ratings on the 10 negative traits were reverse coded and summed with the 10 positive traits to form a composite favorability score. A 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA performed on this favorability score yielded no main effects or interactions, indicating that participants' tendency to distance from the target person was not due to more favorable self-ratings on the 20 personality traits (all $Fs < 1.6$).

Reactions to the target person. We also performed separate 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVAs on the single-item measures of participants' desire to meet the target person and attributions of similarity to the target person. As one can see in Table 2, the pattern of means on the direct rating of similarity item was similar to that on the distancing composite measure. However, as in prior research using this distancing measure, there was no interaction and no significant main effects on this item or the desire-to-meet item.

Self-esteem and affect. A 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA performed on the measure of participants' state self-esteem did not yield any main effects or interactions. Although the main effect of feedback was not significant ($F < 1$), the pattern of means indicated that participants who received positive feedback ($M = 76.75$) tended to report having higher self-esteem than participants who did not receive positive feedback ($M = 74.46$). We also conducted a one-way ANOVA on state self-esteem using only those participants who received positive feedback. There were no differences in state self-esteem across the three self-description conditions ($F < 1$), which is consistent with the idea that having participants write about different aspects of self shifted the basis of their positive self-feelings, without shifting the level of their self-esteem.[5]

A 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA performed on the Positive Affect scale of the PANAS revealed a main effect of feedback, $F(1, 80) = 9.19$, $p < .01$, that was qualified by a significant Feedback × Self-Description interaction, $F(2, 80) = 5.07$, $p < .01$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that whereas participants in the achievement condition reported having higher positive affect when they received positive feedback, $t(80) = 16.97$, $p < .001$, there was no effect of feedback for participants in the intrinsic-self or the false-self condition (both $ts < 1$). Pairwise comparisons further revealed that, in the no-feedback conditions, intrinsic-self participants reported higher positive affect than achievement participants, $t(80) = 3.04$, $p < .01$, and false-self participants, $t(80) = 2.52$, $p < .05$ (see Table 2 for means).

We also performed a 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA on the Negative Affect scale of the PANAS. This analysis revealed a marginal main effect of self-description, $F(2, 80) = 2.76$, $p < .06$, that was qualified by a Self-Description ×

[3] We also constructed participants' distancing scores on the positive and negative traits separately and submitted these measures to a 3 (self-description) × 2 (feedback) ANOVA. These analyses revealed the same pattern of results that was found on the overall distancing measure. Separate ANOVAs performed on these distancing composites revealed a marginal main effect of feedback for the positive distancing composite, $F(1, 84) = 2.84$, $p < .096$, and a significant main effect of feedback for the negative distancing composite, $F(1, 84) = 4.86$, $p < .05$ (positive feedback led to decreased distancing). These main effects were qualified by a Self-Description × Feedback interaction for the positive distancing composite, $F(1, 84) = 3.55$, $p < .05$, and the negative distancing composite, $F(1, 84) = 3.60$, $p < .05$. The pattern of means on the positive and negative distancing composites was very similar to that found on the overall distancing composite. These analyses indicate that participants showed the same pattern of distancing from the target on the positive and negative traits.

[4] We also conducted a series of planned pairwise comparisons to examine our specific predictions that intrinsic-self participants would show reduced distancing when they received positive feedback but would show increased distancing in the absence of such feedback relative to the achievement and false-self conditions combined. The first comparison showed that among participants who received positive feedback, the intrinsic-self participants distanced less than the achievement and false-self participants combined, $t(84) = 1.72$, $p < .08$, but this difference only approached significance. The same comparison among no-feedback participants showed that the intrinsic-self participants distanced more than the achievement and false-self participants combined, $t(84) = 2.15$, $p < .03$.

[5] We also computed the means for the three state self-esteem subscales (Social, Appearance, and Performance Self-Esteem). The means in the positive-feedback conditions for intrinsic self, achieving self, and false self were as follows: Social Self-Esteem, 20.40, 19.73, and 19.50; Appearance Self-Esteem, 20.60, 22.40, and 21.93; and Performance Self-Esteem, 26.07, 25.40, and 26.79, respectively. The means in the no-feedback conditions for intrinsic self, achieving self, and false self were as follows: Social Self-Esteem, 20.68, 18.67, and 19.27; Appearance Self-Esteem, 19.13, 20.80, and 20.73; and Performance Self-Esteem, 26.13, 25.93, and 26.20, respectively. There were no main effects or interactions on any of the self-esteem subscales (all $Fs > 0.18$).

Feedback interaction, $F(2, 80) = 3.38, p < .04$. Pairwise comparisons showed that for intrinsic-self participants, positive feedback decreased negative affect compared with no-feedback participants, $t(80) = 2.93$, $p < .01$. There were no significant differences between no-feedback and positive-feedback participants in the achievement or the false-self condition (both ts < 1). Pairwise comparisons among positive-feedback participants revealed no significant differences in negative affect (all ts < 1). However, pairwise comparisons among no-feedback participants revealed that intrinsic-self participants experienced more negative affect than achievement and false-self participants, $t(80) = 2.52, p < .01$, and $t(80) = 3.40$, $p < .01$, respectively (see Table 2 for means).

Content analysis of participants' essays. Earlier, we proposed that acceptance for intrinsic self-attributes reduces defensiveness because being accepted for more stable, inherent aspects of self produces a more stable basis of self-esteem. If the stable (vs. unstable) aspects of self that participants revealed in their essays played a role in reducing defensiveness, then we would expect participants who were asked to write about their intrinsic self to reflect more stable and enduring aspects of self than participants who were asked to write about their achievements. To explore this hypothesis, we had independent raters (naive to experimental conditions) rate participants' self-descriptive essays according to the following question: "How enduring (likely to be present in the future) was the aspect of self described in this essay?" Each of the two raters coded the essays using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all enduring*) to 5 (*very enduring*). Because participants in the false-self conditions wrote about qualities that were not related to their self-concepts in any way, only the essays from the achievement and intrinsic-self conditions were content analyzed. There was reasonably high agreement between the two raters, $r(62) = .84$, $p < .01$; thus, we created a single-composite measure of stability by averaging the stability ratings of the two raters and dividing by two (i.e., because each participant wrote about two qualities or two achievements). We then performed a 2 (self-description: intrinsic vs. achievement) × 2 (feedback: positive vs. none) ANOVA on the single-composite stability ratings. There was only a main effect of self-description, $F(1, 58) = 99.64$, $p < .0001$, indicating that participants who wrote about their intrinsic self revealed more stable aspects of self than participants who wrote about their achievements (Ms = 4.40 and 2.73, respectively). Although it is difficult to know exactly what it is about the self-descriptions that participants wrote that reduced defensiveness in the presence of social validation, this finding suggests that one important component may be the stability of acceptance that is engendered by validation for more enduring aspects of self.[6]

The findings of Study 2 demonstrate that receiving positive feedback from others after presenting attributes of self perceived as indicators of who one really is reduced participants' tendency to defensively distance from a negative target person. This effect of feedback was not found among participants who described their achievements or who presented a false self. It appears, then, that positive interpersonal feedback reduces defensiveness in other situations only when it is received in response to a presentation of one's intrinsic self-characteristics. This, of course, is consistent with the findings of Study 1, which showed that priming a previous relationship, in which one is accepted conditionally, leads to higher defensiveness.

However, revealing intrinsic aspects of self does not come without a cost. Study 2 also demonstrated that when participants revealed their intrinsic selves and received no feedback, they were more likely to distance from the target person than other no-feedback participants. It appears that when participants described themselves in a personally revealing way (knowing that another person would eventually read their self-description) and did not receive validation for this disclosure, they seemed to feel more vulnerable and therefore responded by defensively distancing from the target person. In support of this interpretation, participants in the intrinsic-self/no-feedback condition reported more negative affect than participants in any of the other conditions. These participants also showed increased positive affect relative to achievement/no-feedback and false-self/no-feedback participants. This increase in both positive and negative affect suggests that such people may have enjoyed revealing their "true" selves but were worried about being vulnerable when doing so. These findings are in line with our supposition that after making a risky disclosure, participants' feelings of self-worth are especially vulnerable to the possible rejection or disapproval of others, and this vulnerability leads them to respond defensively to threats to their self-worth, such as that posed by apparent similarity to another person with undesirable characteristics. All in all, these data suggest that describing one's true self to others may be a risky venture. Acceptance for such intrinsic self-disclosures gives one the benefits of a secure confidence in one's self-worth that can allow one to respond nondefensively. A lack of acceptance for revealing one's intrinsic qualities, however, can leave one feeling vulnerable and unprotected and thus more prone to defensive responses.

It is worth noting that although effects emerged on our composite measure of defensive distancing, the effects on the direct self-report measure of perceived similarity to the undesirable target person, though in the same direction, did not approach statistical significance. This pattern of significant effects on the composite distancing measure, coupled with a similar but nonsignificant pattern on the direct self-report measure, is precisely what has been found in all of the previous research with this measure (Pyszczynski et al., 1993, 1995; Schimel et al., 2000). Presumably, the composite measure of distancing is a more subtle measure of participants' defensiveness in that participants are less aware that they are comparing themselves with the target person. This subtlety may have tapped participants' experiential self-feelings more so than the direct measure of similarity (Epstein, 1994). Furthermore, by allowing participants' defensive motives to surface undetected, the subtle measure of distancing may have allowed participants to maintain an illusion of objectivity about their conclusions regarding their similarity to the target person (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987b). Of course, it may also be that the single-item measure used in these studies is simply less sensitive and less reliable than the composite measures.

[6] Ideally, a within-cell correlation on the intrinsic-self condition could provide additional support for this notion if level of enduringness was inversely correlated with distancing. However, the range of ratings in the intrinsic-self condition in Study 2 and Study 3 was so restricted, consisting of usually 4 or 5, that no meaningful correlation would be expected, and none was found.

Even though positive interpersonal feedback made participants less defensive when this approval was based on acceptance for their intrinsic qualities but had no effect when their sense of acceptance was achievement-based, it is difficult to know whether it was the intrinsic self-disclosure or achievement self-disclosure that had the active effect on defensiveness. Comparisons within feedback conditions tended to suggest that both forms of self-disclosure may have been affecting defensiveness, but these comparisons were marginal and inconclusive. In addition, an alternative explanation for these results is possible: Participants in the achievement and false-self conditions may have been less personally invested in their self-descriptions than participants in the intrinsic-self condition. If this were the case, then these participants may have shown less distancing because the positive feedback they received was simply less meaningful.

Although this alternative explanation seems plausible, there are a number of reasons why it does not adequately explain the observed pattern of results. First, it does not explain why participants in the achievement/feedback condition reported significantly more positive affect than participants in the achievement/no-feedback condition. If participants in the achievement/feedback condition were less personally invested than intrinsic-self/feedback participants, then it seems unlikely that positive feedback would have increased their positive affect to a nonsignificantly higher level than that of intrinsic-self/feedback participants. Second, in addition to reporting an increase in positive affect, achievement/feedback participants were also more likely to say that their essays reflected their true selves than the achievement/no-feedback participants. This finding parallels our supposition that achievement/feedback participants would respond defensively (i.e., by distancing from the target person) to the extent that this increase in perceived authenticity among achievement/feedback participants reflects a desire to maximize the impact of this feedback on their self-esteem. If participants in the achievement conditions were less invested in their self-descriptions, and therefore unaffected by positive feedback, then positive feedback should not have increased their ratings of how much their essays reflected their true selves. The fact that the defensive distancing of achievement participants did not differ from false-self participants, who showed no signs of ego involvement in the feedback (no affective reactions or increased attributions of authenticity), further suggests that achievement participants were engaged in their feedback but that this feedback did not reduce their defensiveness.

Nonetheless, to add confidence to our interpretation that acceptance of one's intrinsic self-attributes reduces defensiveness relative to acceptance of one's achievements, we conducted an additional study in which participants revealed both their achievements and intrinsic qualities to an interaction partner and then received positive feedback that focused on either their achievements or their intrinsic qualities. We had three additional reasons for conducting a third study in which participants received feedback. First, in Study 2, along with intrinsic aspects versus achievement aspects of self, the essays may have varied in the motivation implied—being revealing versus making a good impression. In Study 3, the feedback made it clear that liking was based on either the participant's inner qualities or his or her achievements.

Second, when people present themselves to others, they often do so in a manner that entails a display of multiple aspects of themselves. A side of self may be revealed that reflects their unchanging intrinsic qualities at the same time as they disclose information about their achievements. For example, a candidate in the job market may be quite focused on making his or her evaluators aware of achievements while also trying to communicate his or her intrinsic personal characteristics. The feedback the candidate receives from others, however, may often be focused on particular aspects of the candidate's presentations. Thus, the job candidate might learn that although the prospective employers were impressed with his or her resume, they did not like him or her as a person. In Study 3, we created an experimental situation parallel to such scenarios to address the consequences of receiving single-focused feedback after revealing multiple aspects of self.

The final purpose of Study 3 was to extend our finding of reduced defensiveness after validation of one's intrinsic self-attributes to other forms of defensiveness. Whereas our dependent measures of defensiveness in Studies 1 and 2 pertained specifically to the maintenance of a positive self-image (by selectively exposing oneself to information that implied that one's test performance was better or by distancing oneself from an undesirable other), in Study 3 we chose to investigate another form of defensiveness focused on a preference to engage in self-protective versus self-improvement-oriented counterfactual thinking.

Study 3

One way people defend against the threatening implications of negative life events is by mentally simulating alternative outcomes in a way that minimizes feelings of failure or disappointment. Research on counterfactual reasoning has demonstrated several ways in which people simulate alternative outcomes for negative events (for a review, see, e.g., Roese, 1997). One way is to generate downward counterfactuals, that is, to imagine alternatives that might have been worse than what actually happened. For example, after the breakup of a romantic relationship, one may decide, "Well at least we had fun while we were together," or "At least we are still friends." Another way to simulate alternative outcomes is to generate upward counterfactuals and imagine alternatives that might have improved the outcome of the event. For example, in response to the same breakup, the person might think, "If only I had been less selfish," or "If only I had been more committed to the relationship."

According to research on counterfactual reasoning, people typically generate downward counterfactuals in response to negative events that are not likely to happen in the future and over which they feel little control (Johnson & Sherman, 1990; Roese & Olson, 1995). Thus, downward counterfactuals serve as a sort of consolation prize to get the most out of a bad situation and are conceptualized as a form of affect regulation (Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, & McMullen, 1993). Research also has demonstrated that, in contrast, people tend to generate upward counterfactuals in response to negative life events that are likely to happen again in the future (e.g., Markman et al., 1993). In this light, it seems that upward counterfactuals serve a preparatory function possibly to improve one's situation or to help one cope successfully with similar outcomes in the future. Although they may expose the individual to potential negative affect, they better prepare him or her for future success.

Because of the directional nature of counterfactual thoughts, a number of researchers (e.g., Roese & Olson, 1993; Sanna, 1996)

have drawn parallels between counterfactuals and social comparison processes. More specifically, the effect of downward counterfactuals is likened to downward social comparison by which individuals compare themselves to less fortunate others as a way of enhancing self-esteem (Wills, 1981). Along these same lines, generating upward counterfactuals is likened to upward social comparison by which people compare themselves to others who are better in an attempt to improve themselves (Buunk, Collins, Taylor, Van Yperen, & Dakof, 1990; Roese, 1994; Taylor, Buunk, & Aspinwall, 1990). For example, Roese and Olson (1993) posited that, because people with high self-esteem are motivated to protect a positive self-image, these people show a self-protective pattern of counterfactual thinking following failure, with a propensity to generate downward counterfactuals for negative outcomes. Thus, preference for a particular direction of counterfactual thinking regarding a failure may reflect either a self-protective strategy in the case of downward counterfactuals or a self-improvement strategy in the case of upward counterfactuals. For a negative outcome, a downward counterfactual suggests that the outcome was not so bad. In contrast, an upward counterfactual suggests that the outcome could have been better if only the person had acted otherwise. To the extent that this is true, we expected that positive feedback for intrinsic self-attributes should lead individuals to engage in a self-improvement strategy and generate relatively more upward than downward counterfactuals in response to a failure experience.

We therefore adopted Roese's (1994) measure of counterfactual thinking as yet another indication of defensiveness in Study 3. This measure involves asking participants to generate counterfactuals to a negative event that happened to them. Participants presented both their achievements and their intrinsic self-qualities to another person, received positive feedback that was attributed by the other person to their achievements or their intrinsic qualities or received no feedback, and were then asked to generate upward and downward counterfactuals concerning a negative event. On the basis of our previous findings, we predicted that when participants were given positive feedback for expression of their intrinsic self, they would reduce the defensive preference for downward counterfactuals, relative to participants who received positive feedback for their achievements and to participants who did not receive feedback. However, we expected positive feedback that focused on participants' achievements to have no effect on counterfactual preference.

Method

Participants. Forty-nine introductory psychology students (20 men and 29 women) at the University of Arizona received partial course credit as incentive to participate. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions in a (feedback: intrinsic self vs. achieving self vs. no feedback) single-factor design and were then tested in groups of 2 to 5.

Procedure. As in Study 2, the experimenter began each session by telling participants that the study concerned the getting-acquainted process and how people use information to evaluate others and that to help us examine this process, participants would write a short description of themselves and then give this description to another student in the next room to read. The experimenter also mentioned that the person in the next room would fill out a short page of questions and make some comments about the descriptions and that participants would later be able to examine this feedback. Participants were also told that in a second part of the study they would be asked to recall an event that recently happened to them and then answer some questions about that event.

Participants then wrote their self-descriptions. They were instructed to write a short paragraph describing one of their inner qualities that reveals who they are as a person and then on a second page to write another paragraph describing how talented and competent they are. The instructions for the self-description tasks were the same as those used in Study 2, except that participants were asked to describe only one quality or achievement for each self-description (the order of the instructions was counterbalanced).

When participants were finished with this task, the experimenter individually collected participants' self-descriptions and explained that a student in the room down the hall would read their self-descriptions and answer some questions about them. The experimenter also explained that this might take several minutes, so in the meantime, participants were instructed to start the second part of the experiment, which involved describing a negative life event. Having participants think of a negative life event served to set up participants' generation of upward versus downward counterfactuals later in the experiment. The instructions for the negative life event were modeled after those used by Roese (1994) and read as follows:

> In this next part of the study we are interested in the ongoing processes underlying coping with negative life events. Please take a moment to think of a single event in the last year that happened to you and that was especially negative and/or disappointing. It should also directly involve at least one other person of your approximate age (for example, a fight between you and a friend). In just a few words, please describe this event (keep in mind that this questionnaire is anonymous and confidential).

While participants wrote about a negative life event, the experimenter left the room for 8 min and came back with an envelope containing some instructions, feedback from the student who read participants' self-descriptions, Heatherton and Polivy's (1991) measure of state self-esteem, the upward versus downward counterfactual measure, and some questions that served as manipulation checks, respectively. The experimenter also mentioned that if their self-description feedback was not in the envelope, it was because the other student had not yet finished reading their self-descriptions. Telling participants that their feedback might not be in the envelope enabled the experimenter to remain naive to feedback conditions.

The feedback form in each envelope was the same as the feedback form used in Study 2, except for the comments section at the bottom of the form. The feedback written in the comments section was changed to make it look as though participants' interaction partner was focusing either on their intrinsic qualities or on their achievements. For participants in the intrinsic-self feedback condition, the comments read as follows:

> In my ratings of this person I was basically focusing on what the person wrote when they described their "true self." This part was most informative to me because I believe that a person's value is not dependent on how well they perform, but on the person inside. So based on the way they described their inner qualities, I would really like to get to know him/her.

For participants in the achievement feedback condition, the comments read as follows:

> In my ratings of this person I was basically focusing on what the person wrote when they described their accomplishments and achievements. This part was most informative to me because I like people who live up to high expectations. I guess I have high expectations for myself and other people. So based on what this person described about their ability to achieve, I would really like to get to know him/her.

The next page in the packet was the upward versus downward counterfactual measure that was modeled after Roese and Olson's (1993) measure of counterfactuals. On this form, the instructions read as follows:

> People often have thoughts like "if only . . . " or "well at least . . . " after negative events, in that they can see how things might have turned out better or worse. For example, after a car accident one might say, "If only I had turned at the next street this might not have happened," or "Well at least I wasn't seriously injured." Earlier in this experiment you were asked to remember a negative life event that happened to you in the last year. In the spaces below, please list some specific actions that could have either improved the outcome of that event or made the outcome even worse. Begin each statement with "if only" or "well at least."

Participants were allowed to generate as many counterfactual statements as they could think of. After the counterfactual measure was completed, participants were asked several manipulation check questions pertaining to the person who gave them feedback: "How much do you feel like you would have to perform or prove yourself to be liked by this person?" "How much would you like to get to know the person who read your self-description?" "How likable do you think this person is?" "How much do you think this person really likes you for who you really are?" and "Do you feel as though this person would be critical and evaluative of you if he/she got to know you better?" An additional question pertained to the negative life event that participants wrote about and asked, "How likely is it that a situation like the one you recalled could happen again?" Participants responded to these items on 9-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*). After participants completed the packet, they were fully debriefed, given credit, and dismissed.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation checks. Because participants who received no feedback did not complete the form assessing perceptions of the person providing feedback, we first conducted *t* tests between the intrinsic-self feedback and achievement feedback participants on these measures. For the items assessing how much they felt they had to perform or prove themselves to be liked by their evaluator and how critical and evaluative their evaluator would be toward them, there were significant effects for type of feedback, both $ts(31) > 4.92$, $ps < .02$. As one can see in Table 3, participants in the achievement feedback condition indicated that they would have to prove themselves more to be liked by their evaluator and that their evaluator would be more critical and evaluative of them than participants in the intrinsic-self feedback condition. Ratings of how much they would like to get to know their evaluator, how likable their evaluator was, and how much they felt that their evaluator liked them for who they really are revealed no effect of feedback (all $ts < 1.3$). The last manipulation check question asked all participants how likely it was that the negative event they described earlier would happen in the future. A one-way (feedback) ANOVA performed on this question produced no effect ($F < 1$).

Preference for upward versus downward counterfactual thinking. Within the counterfactual research literature, "if only" statements in response to a life event are generally thought to reflect upward counterfactuals, and statements beginning with "well at least" are thought to reflect downward counterfactuals (e.g., Roese, 1994). However, it is conceivable that some "if only" and "well at least" statements generated by our sample of participants did not conform to these prescriptions. Furthermore, there were a handful of participants who did not follow our instructions to generate "if only" or "well at least" statements despite the instructions they were given. Thus, before constructing our measure of upward and downward counterfactuals, we had two independent raters categorize as either upward or downward the counterfactuals that participants generated. The raters were instructed to code the counterfactuals as upward if the statements focused on how the event could have improved and as downward if the statements focused on how the event could have been worse. There was high agreement between the two raters for both upward, $r(49) = .99$, and downward, $r(49) = .98$, counterfactuals. Disagreements between the two raters were then resolved through discussion, resulting in a single measure of upward and downward counterfactuals for each participant. Then, following Roese (1994), a measure of preference for upward versus downward counterfactuals was constructed by subtracting the number of downward counterfactuals from the number of upward counterfactuals that participants generated in response to the negative life event. Thus, a higher number indicates that participants generated relatively more upward counterfactuals, indicating a low level of defensiveness (cf. Roese, 1994). We used the difference between upward and downward counterfactuals as our measure of defensiveness be-

Table 3
Means for the Interaction of Type of Feedback on Counterfactual Generation: Study 3

Dependent variable	Intrinsic-self feedback (n = 16)	Achievement feedback (n = 17)	No feedback (n = 16)
Performance question	2.31_a (1.85)	4.29_b (1.68)	
Critical–evaluative question	3.50_a (2.03)	5.11_b (2.14)	
Counterfactuals	1.94_a (2.04)	0.17_b (1.94)	0.50_b (1.78)
State self-esteem	79.87_a (9.96)	$74.82_{a,b}$ (9.26)	68.87_b (12.81)
Positive affect	32.56_a (7.68)	34.41_a (6.48)	24.87_b (6.96)
Negative affect	13.06_a (2.17)	$16.58_{a,b}$ (5.96)	17.81_b (6.40)

Note. Attributions of the target and self-description essays were assessed on 9-point scales (ranging from 1 to 9); higher values represent higher attributions. Counterfactual scores represent the number of downward counterfactuals subtracted from the number of upward counterfactuals; thus, higher values reflect more upward counterfactuals. Composite negative affect and positive affect scores were made on 5-point scales (ranging from 1 to 5); higher values reflect higher affect. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$. Standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

cause a difference score controls for people's predisposition to write, their general motivation to generate counterfactuals, and their overall ability to do so. A one-way ANOVA performed on this measure revealed a significant effect of treatment, $F(2, 46) = 3.84$, $p < .03$.[7]

To specifically assess the hypothesis that positive feedback based on intrinsic qualities would reduce defensiveness, we conducted planned pairwise comparisons. As one can see in Table 3, these results revealed the predicted differences between cell means. Participants who received intrinsic-self feedback showed less defensive counterfactual bias than participants who received achievement feedback and participants in the no-feedback condition, both $ts(46) > 2.14$, $ps < .05$. No other pairwise comparisons approached significance, thus suggesting that positive feedback for intrinsic-self aspects uniquely reduced downward counterfactual bias.

Self-esteem and affect. A one-way (feedback) ANOVA performed on state self-esteem scores revealed a significant effect of treatment, $F(2, 46) = 4.19$, $p < .01$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants in the intrinsic-self feedback condition experienced higher state self-esteem than participants in the no-feedback condition, $t(46) = 2.89$, $p < .01$. There was also a trend toward an increase in state self-esteem for participants in the achievement feedback condition relative to participants in the no-feedback condition, $t(46) = 1.59$, $p < .12$. Pairwise comparisons showed no difference in state self-esteem between participants in the intrinsic-self feedback condition and participants in the achievement feedback condition, $t(46) = 1.35$, $p > .14$ (see Table 3 for cell means). Thus, the intrinsic-self feedback clearly increased self-esteem, the achievement feedback tended to increase self-esteem, and there was no difference in self-esteem between these two groups.[8]

A one-way (feedback) ANOVA performed on the Negative Affect scale of the PANAS revealed a significant effect of treatment, $F(2,46) = 3.54$, $p < .02$. As one can see in Table 3, pairwise comparisons showed that participants in the intrinsic-self feedback condition reported less negative affect than participants in either the no-feedback condition, $t(46) = 2.59$, $p < .02$, or the achievement feedback condition, $t(46) = 1.94$, $p < .07$, although this latter comparison only approached significance. No-feedback and achievement feedback participants did not differ from each other (all $ts < 1$).

A similar one-way ANOVA performed on the Positive Affect scale of the PANAS also revealed a significant effect of treatment, $F(2, 46) = 8.38$, $p < .001$. As one can see in Table 3, pairwise comparisons showed that participants in both the intrinsic-self feedback and achievement feedback conditions reported more positive affect than participants in the no-feedback condition, both $ts(46) > 3.07$, $ps < .01$. No other pairwise comparisons were significant.

Content analysis of participants' essays. As in Study 2, we content analyzed participants' essays to examine whether they wrote about more stable aspects of self in their intrinsic-self essays than their achievement essays. If social validation for stable aspects of self revealed in participants' essays played a role in their preference for upward over downward counterfactuals, then we would expect participants' intrinsic-self essays to reflect more stable and enduring aspects of self than their achievement essays. To assess this hypothesis, we had independent raters (naive to experimental conditions) evaluate the intrinsic-self essay and achievement essay that each participant wrote. The raters evaluated the essays using the same question and rating scale that were used in the content analysis of essays in Study 2. There was reasonably high agreement between the two raters for the achievement essays, $r(49) = .71$, $p < .01$. There was low agreement between the two raters for the intrinsic-self essays, $r(49) = .21$, $p > .25$; however, this low correlation was due to a restriction of range in the ratings for each rater. The mean ratings for the intrinsic-self essays for each rater were very high ($Ms = 4.67$ and 4.70), and the standard deviations were very low ($SDs = 0.61$ and 0.53, respectively). Thus, although there was a low correlation between the two raters, there was still very high agreement between them. We therefore constructed a single measure of stability by averaging the ratings of the two raters for the achievement essays and the intrinsic-self essays. We then performed a 2 (feedback: intrinsic self vs. achievement) × 2 (stability rating: intrinsic-self essay vs. achievement essay) ANOVA using stability ratings as a within-participants variable. This analysis revealed only a significant main effect of stability ratings, $F(1, 47) = 86.66$, $p < .0001$, indicating that the intrinsic-self essays were rated as reflecting more stable aspects of self than the achievement essays ($Ms = 4.68$ and 2.58, respectively). Although there may be other reasons why being accepted for expressing one's intrinsic self-attributes reduces defensive reactions, this analysis supports our notion that it may be the increased likelihood of enduring acceptance that is engendered by validation for more stable aspects of self.

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[7] Because we did not limit the number of counterfactuals (upward or downward) that participants could generate, our measure was susceptible to extreme outliers. Indeed, there was 1 participant in our original sample who was an extreme outlier (four standard deviations below the mean) on our difference measure of counterfactual generation. This participant's scores were dropped from our original analysis. The analysis including the outlier yielded an effect of treatment that approached significance, $F(2, 47) = 1.83$, $p < .17$. The means for the counterfactual measure in the original sample were as follows: intrinsic-self feedback, $M = 1.53$; achievement-self feedback, $M = 0.17$; and no feedback, $M = 0.50$. Eliminating this outlier did not significantly change the results on self-esteem, $F(2, 47) = 4.58$, $p < .02$; positive affect, $F(2, 47) = 8.70$, $p < .001$; negative affect, $F(2, 47) = 3.33$, $p < .05$; or any of the manipulation check questions.

[8] We also computed the means for the three state self-esteem subscales, which generally mirrored the means on the overall state self-esteem measure. For the noncontingent, contingent, and no-feedback conditions, the means were as follows: Social Self-Esteem, 28.24, 26.41, and 24.13; Appearance Self-Esteem, 23.53, 20.82, and 18.50; and Performance Self-Esteem, 28.35, 27.59, and 26.25, respectively. We performed one-way ANOVAs on each of the state self-esteem subscales. There was no effect of treatment for the Performance Self-Esteem subscale ($F < 1$). There was a significant effect of treatment for Social Self-Esteem, $F(2, 46) = 3.08$, $p < .05$, and Appearance Self-Esteem, $F(2, 46) = 5.78$, $p < .01$. Pairwise comparisons on Appearance Self-Esteem showed that intrinsic-self feedback led to higher state self-esteem than no feedback, $t(46) = 3.39$, $p < .01$, and marginally higher self-esteem than achievement feedback, $t(46) = 1.80$, $p < .07$. Pairwise comparisons on Social Self-Esteem revealed that intrinsic-self feedback led to higher state self-esteem than no feedback, $t(46) = 2.48$, $p < .05$. No other pairwise comparisons were significant.

Interestingly, in Study 3 (in contrast to Study 2), social validation of participants' achievements, and particularly their intrinsic self-attributes, led to increased self-esteem relative to no feedback. We suspect the reason for this finding is because in Study 3, all the participants were first asked to recall a negative life event to set up the counterfactual task that would come later in the experiment. Thus, it may be that the apparent increase in self-esteem in the feedback conditions was not the result of the feedback per se but was the result of lowered self-esteem in the control condition after the negative event was recalled. Consistent with this notion, the self-esteem means for no-feedback participants in Study 2 (collapsed across conditions) were higher than the self-esteem means for no-feedback participants in Study 3 (Ms = 74.46 and 68.87, respectively).

Study 3 demonstrated that within the context of a complex, multifaceted social interaction in which one presented multiple sides of oneself, positive feedback from others in response to intrinsic aspects of self reduced defensiveness. In contrast, similarly positive feedback in response to meeting standards of achievement did not reduce counterfactual defensiveness. Specifically, participants who were told that they were liked because of their intrinsic inner qualities showed less bias toward downward counterfactuals, but those who were told that they were liked because of their achievements did not show less downward counterfactual bias. This finding suggests that, relative to the other participants, intrinsic-self feedback participants were more motivated to improve rather than to protect their current self-feelings. Participants who were told they were liked because of their accomplishments, in contrast, were just as ego-defensive in their generation of counterfactuals as were control participants. These results are consistent with Studies 1 and 2 in demonstrating that social acceptance for one's intrinsic self-attributes can reduce defensiveness.

General Discussion

The present findings converge on the conclusion that whereas positive social feedback based on what one considers to be intrinsic aspects of self reduces defensive reactions, positive social feedback based on one's accomplishments and achievements does not. Study 1 demonstrated that priming past relationships with others who intrinsically accept one—for who one is—leads to less defensive bias in the search for social comparison information after an ego-relevant performance than priming relationships with contingently accepting others. Study 2 demonstrated that whereas receiving positive feedback from others after describing one's intrinsic self-attributes reduces defensive distancing from an undesirable other, positive feedback from others after describing one's accomplishments and achievements does not reduce such defensive distancing. Study 3 demonstrated that within the context of a complex, multifaceted presentation of self, being accepted by others for intrinsic aspects of oneself reduces defensive biases in counterfactual thinking, whereas being accepted by others for one's accomplishments and achievements does not. These findings were generally consistent across three different operationalizations of type of interpersonal relationship or interaction and across three different operationalizations of defensiveness. Taken as a whole, the present findings suggest that there are important differences in the psychological consequences of validation of different aspects of self—particularly in defensiveness.

These findings support the growing chorus of authors who have argued that there are important qualitative distinctions in the nature of self-esteem that may prove to be more important than the simple evaluative valence of one's self-evaluation (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Crocker & Wolfe, in press; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Epstein & Morling, 1995; Kernis & Waschull, 1995; Pelham & Hetts, 1999; Solomon et al., 1991). Although there are important differences among the distinctions emphasized by various authors, there appear to be some basic similarities. All of these perspectives suggest that a stable sense of self rooted in experiences and social interactions in which one behaves in an authentic and relatively nonstrategic manner provides a more secure base from which to live one's life. We would suggest that in the intrinsic-self conditions of the studies reported in this article, we validated a sense of self that is stable (Kernis & Waschull, 1995), noncontingent (Crocker & Wolfe, in press), and authentic (Deci & Ryan, 1995; Rogers, 1959) in nature. Whereas self-esteem gained from contingent acceptance may vary (wax and wane) depending on the successful attainment of achievement standards, self-esteem gained from acceptance for one's intrinsic aspects of self may be more stable and thus more likely to allow people to let their defenses down. The present findings are thus consistent with Kernis and colleagues' (e.g., Berry et al., 1994; Kernis et al., 1989, 1992) program of research demonstrating that stable self-esteem is associated with generally low levels of defensiveness and self-deception. Because the present research used experimental manipulations of social contexts surrounding the self, these studies may well be the first to demonstrate the causal relationship between social validation for one's intrinsic inner qualities and low levels of defensiveness.

It is important to note that the basis of self-esteem shown to reduce defensiveness in the present research did not function independently of reactions from others. Across all three studies, the acceptance of others was a necessary ingredient for the reduction in defensiveness that was observed. This, of course, is consistent with the many theoretical perspectives that view the self and self-esteem as essentially social creations that are largely a product of our interactions with others. Although there are several ways of conceptualizing the dependence of self-esteem on the approval of others, in accord with many theorists, we think of others as providing much-needed validation of one's self-concept and positive self-evaluation (e.g., Allport, 1961; Becker, 1962; Festinger, 1954; Goffman, 1959; Greenberg et al., 1986; Heider, 1958; Mead, 1964). To the extent that people conceive of the world as a place that actually exists, with a reality separate from their perceptions of it, they require validation from others to assure them that their conceptions of the world and themselves are valid and accurate, and not simply the result of personal whims or biases.

Although the present findings suggest that social validation of qualities that one considers indicative of one's instrinsic self can reduce defensiveness, they also suggest that such self-disclosures are not easy or without cost. Recall that in Study 2, the highest levels of defensiveness were observed among intrinsic-self participants who did not receive feedback from their partners. These participants also reported elevated levels of negative and positive affect. Although it may feel good and be liberating to reveal one's

"true" self, it is also risky because of the greater damage to self-esteem that would result from rejection after this type of self-presentation. It appears, then, that unvalidated self-disclosures of intrinsic self-characteristics left participants especially vulnerable and defensive. This finding may help explain why such intrinsic self-disclosures are less common than humanistic psychologists would like and why people so often resort to more strategic presentations of self in which they attempt to put their best foot forward.

Implications and Conclusion

As we have argued throughout this article, a critical distinction for understanding how self-esteem affects defensiveness is whether an individual's operative sense of self-esteem is derived from intrinsic aspects of self or achievement-based aspects of self. From this perspective, true, nondefensive self-esteem is derived not from the recognition that one has met socially defined performance standards, but from the feelings concerning what one considers to be one's intrinsic or true self. We do not, however, wish to imply that achievements and accomplishments are not sometimes an important part of the self. A critical aspect in this research seems to be what the individual considers to be his or her true, inherent self. To the extent that one's achievements reflect attributes and serve goals and values that are authentic or integrated aspects of the self, validation of such achievements could indeed bolster positive feelings about the intrinsic self. However, as recent research by Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) suggests, achievements often serve extrinsic goals. In addition, even when achievements do reflect intrinsic aspects of the self, approval from others may appear to be focused on the extrinsic accomplishment itself rather than the intrinsic aspect of the self, which may have been responsible for the achievement.

The distinction between self-esteem based on acceptance for one's intrinsic self-attributes and self-esteem based on one's achievements may have important implications for understanding psychological adjustment and mental health. As humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1959), Allport (1961), and Maslow (1968) have pointed out, psychological disability results when people are prevented from being who they really are. Concerns about winning approval and living up to standards keep people from experiencing reality firsthand, which may result in anxiety and defensive behavior aimed at maintaining the integrity of self. In contrast, when people feel loved and accepted for who they are, they are more open to experience and less concerned about defending their self-concept against threat. As Deci and Ryan (1995) suggested, acceptance from others for one's autonomous behavior enables people to develop a fully integrated, true sense of self. These classic and contemporary humanistic perspectives suggest that contingency-based self-esteem—the feeling that one is valuable to the extent that one is living up to social standards—may be associated with less than optimal psychological functioning. Conversely, more authenticity-based self-esteem—the feeling that one is loved and accepted for who one is regardless of what one achieves or how one measures up to external standards of achievement—may be associated with personality growth and healthy psychological functioning.

In support of this notion, Sheldon and colleagues (e.g., Sheldon & Kasser, 1998; Sheldon et al., 1997) have shown that when people strive for personal goals that are in line with inherent psychological needs (i.e., authentic goals), they report an increase in psychological well-being. In the research reported in the present article, we found that being liked by another person for expressing one's intrinsic self reduced participants' tendencies to be defensive. Indeed, few psychologists and clinicians would disagree that when individuals are free from defensive concerns and feel secure, they are more open to experience and more able to overcome psychological difficulties. However, we would caution against labeling achievements and external goals as inherently *bad* and expressions of intrinsic self-aspects as inherently *good*. Achievements and external goals are clearly important for psychological functioning in certain situations. For example, some individuals who have had little experience with unconditional acceptance or positive regard from others may be better off relying on a contingent form of self-esteem than having low self-esteem. Even the positive self-appraisals that one gains from striving for achievement and winning social approval may help prevent some people from slipping into depression or experiencing other psychological problems. In addition, many of the social standards that people strive to meet are in line with intrinsic aspects of themselves. Thus, social validation for living up to such standards may also validate people's authentic self-identities and promote psychological well-being. It may be that contingent acceptance or acceptance for one's achievements contributes to defensiveness and other psychological problems only when the standards that people are striving to attain are not perceived as their own. Research is needed to examine this proposition.

Furthermore, it also seems likely that acceptance for living up to standards and achievements is necessary to motivate one to function successfully in performance situations. As Berglas and Jones (1978; Jones & Berglas, 1978) argued, insecure success may lead college students to self-handicap, which may undermine their performance in academic domains. In the same way, too much unconditional acceptance in the absence of any contingent acceptance may hamper one's desire to achieve or develop one's skills and abilities in performance domains. If people were unconditionally loved in all domains of life, would they still be as driven to succeed? Would Thomas Edison, John D. Rockefeller, and Bill Gates have achieved as much as they did? In a few words, contingencies for social and self-approval may be important motivators of accomplishments, which, even if they serve materialistic goals, may be beneficial to the well-being of others and the broader culture.

In a similar vein, standard-based self-esteem might function to defend one from certain kinds of threat against which intrinsically based self-esteem is less effective. Consistent with this possibility, Greenberg et al. (1986) proposed that high self-esteem from living up to cultural standards serves as an anxiety buffer and reduces people's fear of their own mortality by affirming their belief that they are a valuable member of a meaningful universe. In support of these notions, research has shown that positive personality and performance feedback reduces anxiety in response to threat and defensive responses to reminders of death (Arndt & Greenberg, 1999; Greenberg et al., 1992, 1993; Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1997). On the basis of this research, one could argue that self-esteem resulting from meeting cultural standards may help ward off basic existential anxiety and

fuel the development of practical skills and abilities that people need to achieve in performance-based situations.

However, given that intrinsically based self-esteem reduced defensiveness in the present studies, validating intrinsic aspects of self may be particularly useful for managing existential terror as well. The most effective anxiety buffer may be to believe that one's inherent, enduring qualities are of value in the context of one's worldview. Certainly, more empirical research is needed to address these and many other issues regarding the costs and benefits of different sources of self-esteem. Although level of self-esteem may broadly influence how well people cope with life's demands, this research, along with other recent findings, indicates that so too do the particular aspects of self that are socially valued and validated.

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