
Self-Esteem Protection Within a Close Relationship

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ABSTRACT - Self-esteem protection within a close relationship was investigated to determine how people behave in performance situations with a close other. After having already scored better or worse than a close other or a stranger on an intelligence test, half of the close participants were led to expect a comparison of scores. Participants then chose music that varied in helpfulness for themselves and the other to listen to when performing a similar test. Contrary to predictions, close comparison participants did not choose more helpful music for the other than did participants paired with a stranger. Implications for the other enhancement literature (Shepperd & Arkin, 1991) and how the present research can provide a bridge between the literature on self-protection and the literature on interpersonal relationships are discussed.

For most people, an extraordinary emphasis is placed upon achievement and success. However, the impact of a good or poor performance will depend on whether the performance is perceived as important to the individual and therefore relevant to the individual's self-evaluation (Jones & Berglas, 1978; Tesser, 1988). Most of the research on self-evaluation has focused on the individual and how individuals behave when facing a potentially esteem threatening personal performance when alone (e.g., Tesser, 1988; Higgins, Snyder & Berglas, 1990; Shepperd & Arkin, 1991), where the only people who will learn of their performance are strangers. There has been relatively little research investigating how people behave when both they and a close other are simultaneously facing a potentially esteem threatening performance and a comparison of performances is expected (Beach & Tesser, 1993; Beach, Tesser, Mendolia, Anderson, Crelia, Whitaker & Fincham, 1996).

Because interpersonal relationships are important to most individuals' lives and people spend a good deal of time with others, it seems likely that people will often find that they are facing an esteem threatening performance when close others are present and will learn of the outcome. It is also possible that if people were performing the same task as a close other, and a person's own and the close other's performance could not be compared, most people would hope that the close other would perform well (Beach & Tesser, 1993). However, if people are expecting a comparison of performances with a close other, and the performance is on a task that is relevant to their self-esteem, their concern for self and their own performance may override their concern for the other. In this case, outperforming a close other may become more important than concern for a close other's performance (Tesser, 1988; Beach & Tesser, 1993). Because self-concern is often not

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congruent with concern for another, the opportunity for conflict arises. It has been suggested that only when individuals include another person in their self-concept will concern for another not conflict with concern for self (Aron, Aron, Tudor & Nelson, 1991). Therefore, how people behave when they and a close other are both facing an esteem threatening performance and a comparison of performances will depend on the relevance of the performance to their self-esteem, individuals' motivation to protect their self-esteem, and motivation to maintain the closeness of the relationship (Tesser, 1988).

A self-esteem protection strategy that has received considerable research attention has been labeled "self-handicapping" (for reviews see Berglas, 1987, and Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990). What is not known, however, is whether the concern for a close other and/or relationship concerns, such as desire to maintain a close relationship, might affect the individual's tendency to self-handicap. Because it is likely that people will often find that they are facing an esteem threatening performance when close others are present and will learn of the outcome, and because interpersonal relationships are important to most people, research needs to address how people behave when both they and a close other are simultaneously facing a potentially esteem threatening performance and a comparison of performances is expected.

Performing an esteem-threatening task with a close other may increase an individual's tendency to self-handicap because of the increase in evaluative stress due to the public nature of the performance (i.e., the close other will learn of the results) (Berglas & Jones, 1978). In addition, it is possible that the desire to maintain the relationship (i.e., importance of the relationship) will provide additional importance to the performance and increase the felt stress, and the tendency to self-handicap, because individuals typically want to look good for their partner. On the other hand, the importance of the relationship may also affect people's motivation to help the other do well, so that their partner obtains a good outcome and recognizes the intention to benefit the relationship. Because of the closeness of the relationship and greater familiarity with the other, close participants are also expected to think that the other places greater importance on doing well than do strangers. According to self-evaluation maintenance theory (SEM), people's behavior should depend on the closeness of the relationship and the relevance of the task to self and other (Tesser, 1988).

Shepperd and Arkin (1991) suggest that individuals can achieve the same attributional goal as self-handicapping (i.e., managing the attributions for a performance outcome) by giving the relevant comparison other an actual performance advantage. By "other-enhancing," people are able to protect their self-esteem in much the same way as self-handicapping, but other-enhancement does not actually help or hinder their own performance. Other-enhancement might also be perceived as more desirable than self-handicapping behavior because a relevant comparison other is helped. Shepperd and Arkin (1991) also suggest that other-enhancement might be preferred to self-handicapping in contexts in which both strategies are available. It is possible, however, that when individuals find themselves anticipating a comparison of performances with a close other, they may be even more likely to other-enhance than if the other were a stranger. Specifically, while benefiting the other may be seen as an act of altruism, it is also possibly an indication of motivation to maintain and even strengthen the relationship with the other. In other words, by benefiting the close other, people may be attempting to show their concern for the other and motivation to strengthen the relationship and also get the benefit of obscuring the cause of their own poor performance. Therefore, there are multiple possible motives for choosing to other-enhance when performing a potentially esteem threatening task with a close other and a comparison of performances is expected.

Overview and Predictions

To begin investigating the issue of how people behave in performance situations with a close other, the present research draws on a paradigm used to study other-enhancement (Shepperd & Arkin, 1991). As suggested by past research (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Shepperd & Arkin, 1991) a measure of intelligence is perceived as relevant to college students' self-concept, and so it should be important to participants to score well. A male and a female participated together in each experimental session. Participants in each session were either dating each other (close relationship) or they were strangers, but currently involved in a dating relationship with someone else. To make sure that all participants were recruited from the same population, dating couples and participants for the "stranger condition" were selected from the population of dating individuals. After completing a measure of intelligence, participants were led to expect a second test and then half of the participants were given success feedback relative to the other participant. To accomplish this, each pair of participants completed a "practice" test designed to be so difficult that most people felt that they were guessing at their answers and therefore most were not sure how well they did on the test. Half of the participants were then told that they scored higher than the other participant and half were told that the other had scored higher. In this way, expectations for future success, relative to the other participant, were manipulated. Scoring worse feedback was also expected to result in greater performance anxiety than scoring better feedback. In addition, half of the participants in the close conditions were led to expect a comparison of scores after the second test, while the other half were not. The anticipation of a comparison of performances was not only expected to result in greater feelings of the importance of doing well, but also increase the need for self-esteem protection. All of the participants in the stranger condition were led to expect a comparison of scores after the second test. Finally, all participants selected the music that they and the other participant would listen to while taking the second test. The selection of music was the main dependent measure.

In summary, the variables of interest in the present study include relationship type (dating couples or strangers), pretest feedback (scored better than other or scored worse than other) and for the dating couple participants, the expectation of a comparison of performances (comparison or no comparison). The manipulation of these three factors resulted in six experimental conditions. It was not thought necessary to have a comparison group of strangers who did not expect a comparison of scores, since research has not found evidence of other-enhancement when strangers did not expect a comparison of scores (Shepperd & Arkin, 1991). Therefore, this was not a complete factorial design. This study was designed to answer two main questions: (1) will having a co-participant who is close affect how participants behave in an esteem threatening performance situation, and (2) will the anticipation of a comparison with a close other result in greater self-protective behavior than when no comparison is expected.

It was anticipated that in the scored better conditions, the presence of a close other would increase the tendency to self-handicap, or result in participants hindering their own performance more than they hinder their performance in the stranger condition. In line with previous research which found that participants given failure feedback were less likely to self-handicap and were even inclined to enhance their own performance (Rhodewalt & Davison, 1986), participants in the scored worse conditions were expected to enhance their own performance, with close participants enhancing their own performance more than strangers because of the implications for future interaction. Finally, consistent with the self-handicapping and other-enhancement literature, it was predicted that men would be more likely than women to engage in self-handicapping and other-enhancement (Berglas & Jones, 1978; Shepperd & Arkin, 1991).

In addition to the predictions for the main dependent measures of music choice for self and other, predictions were also made for other dependent measures. It was hypothesized that participants would feel it more important to do well when performing an esteem-threatening task with a relationship partner than with a stranger. Participants were also expected to feel it more important to do well when a comparison of scores was expected than when a comparison was not expected.

Method

Participants

Eighty-one undergraduates (40 males and 41 females), with a mean age of 23 years, volunteered to participate as part of the introductory psychology course requirements at the University of Kansas. Most participants were selected from the pool of introductory psychology students who volunteered to attend a departmental "data gathering session" at the beginning of the semester called "mass testing," as partial fulfillment of their psychology course requirement. Individuals were contacted by phone and asked to participate if they met all of the following selection criteria: currently involved in a heterosexual dating relationship for at least one month, and not married, engaged, or sharing a common residence with their dating partner. Participants were randomly assigned to bring their dating partner or participate with a stranger and then called and recruited so that some of the participants reported to the lab with their dating partner (close condition), whereas it was arranged so that others reported to the lab to form male-female pairs (stranger condition). Therefore, half of the participants in the close conditions ($n = 27$) were the dating partners of the volunteers and either were or were not introductory psychology students.

Procedures

The research was presented as a study of the intellectual similarity of dating couples, and the effect of music on performance on an intellectual test (see the research procedures of Sheppard & Arkin, 1991). Participants in the stranger condition were also told that their participation was for comparison. A male and a female participated together in each experimental session, either a dating couple or strangers who were currently involved in a dating relationship with someone else. While in the same room, participants completed a "practice" test designed to be so difficult that most people felt that they were guessing at their answers and therefore most were not sure how well they did on the test. After completing the practice test, one of the participants was taken to a separate room by a same gender experimenter and then both experimenters left the participants alone in order to go "score" the tests. Each participant was then randomly assigned to condition. According to the condition assignment, half of the participants were given success feedback relative to the other participant, and half of the participants were led to expect a second test. To accomplish this, experimenters scored participant's tests to reflect the assigned condition of either success or failure. Half of the participants were then shown their test and told that they scored higher than the other participant and half were told that the other had scored higher. In this way, expectations for future success, relative to the other participant, were manipulated. In addition, half of the participants in the close conditions were led to expect a comparison of scores after the second test, while the other half were not. All of the participants in the stranger condition were led to expect a comparison of scores after the second test. Finally, all participants selected the music that they and the other participant would listen to, while taking the second test, from an array of music tapes that varied in helpfulness (Sheppard & Arkin, 1991). There were seven cassette tapes, each labeled to indicate the helpfulness of the music (e.g., 1 = extremely

unhelpful; 4 = neutral; and 7 = extremely helpful). Because there was only one set of cassette tapes, this made it impossible for the participant to select the same tape for both people. In previous research (Shepperd & Arkin, 1991) participants were assigned the neutral tape and only asked to select, from the remaining tapes, what the other person would listen to. In order to allow more freedom of choice in the present study, participants were allowed to select their own music as well as what the other would listen to. The selection of music was the main dependent measure.

After making the tape selections, participants completed an experimental experience questionnaire and a questionnaire to assess their expectations about how they felt they would perform on the second test as well as their perceptions about the experiment. This 9-point Likert-type scale questionnaire included items to determine the importance of performing well and how much importance they thought the other placed upon doing well (1 = not important; 9 = very important).

Results

Analysis Strategy for Partner Interdependence

The issue of "partner interdependence" has recently been discussed in the literature as a potential problem for investigators studying couples (e.g., married, dating, same gender friends, etc.; Kenny, 1996). An assumption of most statistical analyses is that observations are independent of one another. This assumption may be violated in research with couples because scores from both partners from the same couple are likely to be related to each other (Kashy & Snyder, 1995).

As one attempt to minimize this potential problem of non-independence, participants were randomly assigned to conditions. However, to determine whether non-independence was still a problem, the present data were reanalyzed to determine the significance of any possible non-independence due to both members of couples participating. Participants' data were dummy coded to indicate who participated with their dating partner. Because both partners of dating couples only participated in the close conditions, it was only these data that were dummy coded and analyzed. Since a total of 27 couples participated, this resulted in a new *couple* variable with 26 data points, and this new couple variable was used as a covariate to analyze the data from the close conditions. Results did not reveal the *couple* variable to account for a significant portion of the variance for the dependent measure of music choice for self, $F(26, 27) = 1.04, ns$. Results for the music choice for other also did not reveal the couples variable to account for a significant portion of the variance, $F(26, 27) = .68, ns$. Since the couple variable was not found to account for a significant amount of the variance on these two main dependent variables, non-independence was apparently not a problem for the present data. Because non-independence was not found to be a problem for the two main dependent measures, it was therefore not felt necessary to conduct these same analyses on the other dependent measure.

Analysis Strategy

The hypothesis that people's tendency to self-handicap and other-enhance would be affected by relative pre-task performance, type of relationship to other participant, and the expectation of a final performance comparison was tested separately for participant's music selection for self and other. All dependent measures were submitted to a 2 (Performance feedback: scored better or scored worse) \times 3 (Condition: strangers, close comparison, or close no comparison) \times 2 (Gender: male or female) analysis of variance (ANOVA). Focused contrast analyses were also performed on all dependent measures. The first contrast was designed to test the prediction that the presence of a close other

would result in greater self-protective behavior than if the other was a stranger. In this *stranger contrast* a weight of +1 was assigned to the strangers condition and a weight of -1 was assigned to the close comparison condition, with a weight of 0 assigned to the close no comparison condition. The second contrast was designed to test the prediction that the anticipation of a comparison of performances with a close other would result in greater self-protective behavior than when no comparison was expected. Therefore, in the *comparison contrast* a weight of 0 was assigned to the strangers condition, with a weight of +1 assigned to the close comparison condition and a weight of -1 assigned to the close no comparison condition. In other words, these comparisons were designed to ignore the "0" group and to compare the -1 and +1 groups.

Music Selection DV

Music selection for Self. Consistent with the self-handicapping literature (Higgins, Snyder & Berglas, 1990), it was predicted that participants who scored better on the initial test would select less helpful music for self (self-handicap more) than participants who scored worse. Results for *self music selection* did not reveal a significant main effect for performance feedback, $F(1, 69) = 2.85, p > .05$. Contrary to predictions, participants who scored better ($M = 4.16$) did not select less helpful music for self (self-handicapped more) than participants who scored worse ($M = 4.95$). Among those who scored better, close comparison participants were expected to select less helpful music for self (self-handicap more) than strangers or close no comparison participants. Close comparison participants who scored worse were expected to select more helpful music for self than strangers or close no comparison participants who scored worse. Contrary to predictions, there was no interaction between performance feedback and condition, $F(2, 69) = 1.72, ns$ (see Table 1). In line with past self-handicapping results (Berglas & Jones, 1978) men were expected to select less helpful music than women for self (self-handicap more). However, there was not a significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 69) = 2.75, ns$. Men ($M = 5.10$) did not select less helpful music than women ($M = 5.95$) for self. There were no other significant main effects or interactions, nor were the focused contrasts significant.

Table 1
Mean Music Choice for Self and Other as a Function of Performance Outcome and Condition

Performance Feedback	Condition					
	Strangers		Close Comparison		Close No Comparison	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Scored Better	29 %		7 %		31 %	
Self	3.22	1.82	4.15	1.74	5.09	1.52
Other	5.29	1.79	6.20	1.22	5.73	1.59
	(n = 14)		(n = 14)		(n = 13)	
Scored Worse	77 %		57 %		69 %	
Self	5.01	2.27	5.08	2.40	4.78	2.21
Other	3.55	1.63	4.45	2.41	3.64	2.20
	(n = 13)		(n = 14)		(n = 13)	

Note. Higher numbers reflect greater helpfulness of the music. A score of 4.0 represents the neutral point. Percentages represent the proportion of participants in each cell choosing more helpful music for other than for self.

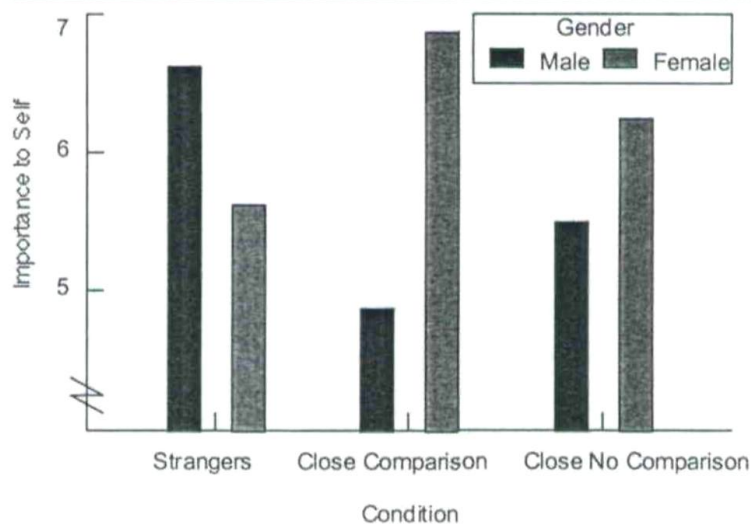
Music selection for Other. Regarding the selection of music for other, participants were expected to choose more helpful music for a close other than for a stranger. There was not a significant main effect for the *stranger* contrast, $F(1, 69) = 3.06, p > .05$; contrary to prediction, close comparison participants ($M = 5.38$) did not choose more helpful music for the other than did strangers ($M = 4.42$). Consistent with the other enhancement literature, it was predicted that participants who scored better would select less helpful music for the other than participants who scored worse. Results for *other music selection* did reveal a significant main effect for performance feedback, $F(1, 69) = 18.32, p < .001$; however, contrary to predictions, participants who scored better ($M = 5.77$) selected more helpful music for the other than did participants who scored worse ($M = 3.88$). This is contrary to the findings of the other-enhancement literature. Following the logic of SEM, close comparison participants who scored worse were expected to select less helpful music for the other than either strangers or close no comparison participants who scored worse. Results, however, revealed just the opposite, $F(5, 69) = 4.02, p < .05$; close comparison participants who scored worse selected more helpful music for the other ($M = 5.3$) than strangers selected for the other ($M = 4.5$) or close no comparison participants ($M = 4.5$) selected for the other. There was not a significant interaction between the *comparison* contrast and gender, $F(1, 69) = 3.02, p > .05$. Results revealed that close females expecting a comparison of performances ($M = 5.45$) chose music of the same helpfulness as close females who did not expect a comparison of performances ($M = 3.81$), and close males expecting a comparison of performances ($M = 5.20$) chose music of the same helpfulness as close males who did not expect a comparison of performances ($M = 5.56$). On the other hand, while results did not indicate that close comparison males ($M = 5.20$) differed from close comparison females ($M = 5.45$), $F(1, 79) = .63, ns$, results did reveal that close no comparison females ($M = 3.70$) chose significantly less helpful music for the other than close no comparison males chose for the other ($M = 5.56$), $F(1, 79) = 5.53, p < .05$. Looking at this pattern, it is clear that the females are doing something different from the males. These results indicate that while close males and females were equally helpful to the other when a comparison of performances was expected, close males chose much more helpful music for the other than did close females when no comparison was expected. Close no comparison females may have felt that since no comparison was expected, they could provide their partner with a challenge without causing them harm. Finally, there was not a significant main effect for gender, $F(1, 69) = 3.67, p > .05$; males ($M = 5.25$) did not choose more helpful music for the other than did females ($M = 4.41$). There were no other significant main effects or interactions.

Reactions to Experimental Conditions

Importance to Self. It was hypothesized that participants would feel it more important to do well when performing an esteem-threatening task with a relationship partner than with a stranger. It was also hypothesized that participants would feel it more important to do well when a comparison of scores was expected than when no comparison was expected. For importance to self, there was a significant interaction between condition and gender, $F(2, 69) = 9.62, p < .001$ (see Figure 1). These results were supported by a significant interaction between the *stranger* contrast and gender, $F(1, 69) = 19.05, p < .001$. However, there was not a significant interaction between the *comparison* contrast and gender, $F(1, 69) = 3.87, p > .05$. Follow-up tests revealed that males in the stranger condition ($M = 6.68$) claimed it more important to do well than those in the close comparison condition ($M = 4.96$), $F(1, 79) = 12.53, p < .001$, and females in the close comparison condition ($M = 6.91$) claimed it more important to do well than those in the stranger condition ($M = 5.75$), $F(1, 79) = 4.45, p < .05$. There were no significant

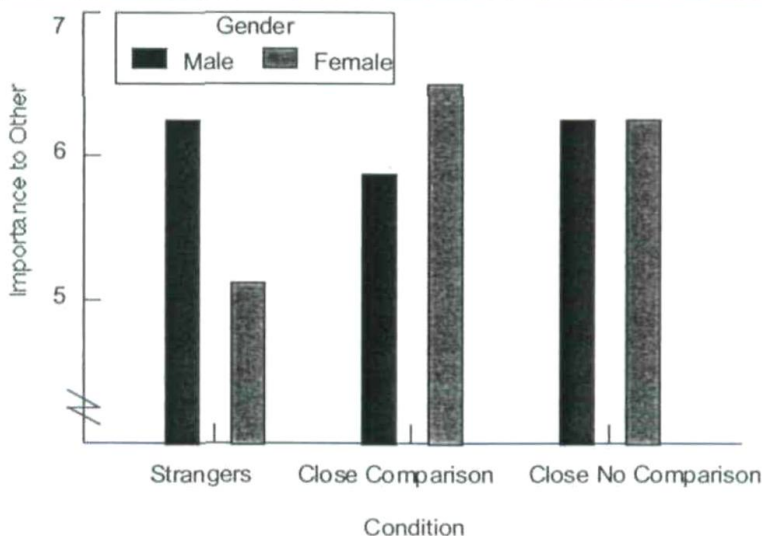
differences between males in the close comparison condition and males in the close no comparison condition ($M = 5.58$), $F(1, 79) = .28$, *ns*, or females in the close comparison condition and females in the close no comparison condition ($M = 6.23$), $F(1, 79) = .07$, *ns*. Follow-up tests also revealed that males felt it was more important than females to do well in the stranger condition, $F(1, 79) = 4.00$, $p < .05$, while females felt it was more important than males in the close comparison condition, $F(1, 79) = 19.74$, $p < .001$. It is possible that males in the close comparison condition were engaging in anticipatory self-protective behavior by decreasing the importance to self of doing well in order to avoid a potentially esteem threatening comparison with their relationship partner. On the other hand, the fact that females in the close comparison condition felt it much more important to do well may be an indication of their focus on the relationship and their desire to look competent to their relationship partner. There was no difference in reported importance to self between males and females in the close no comparison condition, $F(1, 79) = 1.72$, *ns*.

Figure 1
Importance to Self of Performing Well as a Function of Condition and Gender



Importance to Other. It was hypothesized that close participants would think the other placed a greater importance on doing well than strangers because of their greater familiarity. Because they are relationship partners and more familiar, they should have a better sense of what is and is not important to the other. Results did not reveal a significant main effect for condition, $F(2, 69) = 2.50$, $p < .09$. Therefore, contrary to predictions, close comparison participants ($M = 6.26$) did not think that doing well would be more important to the other than strangers ($M = 5.78$), and close comparison participants estimation of importance to other did not differ significantly from close no comparison participants ($M = 6.57$). Results did indicate that in the stranger conditions, participants who scored worse ($M = 6.46$) thought the other would find it more important to do well than did participants who scored better ($M = 5.43$), $F(1, 77) = 5.02$, $p < .05$.

Figure 2
 Importance to Other of Performing Well as a Function of Condition and Gender



There was a significant interaction between condition and gender, $F(2, 69) = 3.46, p < .05$ (see Figure 2). This interaction was supported by a significant interaction between the *stranger* contrast and gender, $F(1, 69) = 5.88, p < .05$. Follow-up tests within the stranger condition revealed that males ($M = 6.38$) thought the other would find it significantly more important to do well than did females ($M = 5.19$), $F(1, 79) = 6.83, p < .05$. While there was no difference between stranger males' estimation ($M = 6.32$) and close comparison males' ($M = 5.96$) estimation of the importance to the other, $F(1, 79) = .05, ns$, as predicted close comparison females ($M = 6.55$) thought it would be significantly more important to the other than did stranger females ($M = 5.19$), $F(1, 79) = 12.84, p < .001$. These results may be an indication that the females in the stranger condition were not as concerned with the other as were males in the stranger condition. There were no other significant main effects or interactions.

Discussion

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the potential conflict between individuals' motivation to protect self-esteem and their motivation to maintain a close relationship and the implications of this conflict for behavior in a potentially esteem threatening performance situation. For the key dependent measures of music selection for self and other, it was predicted that participants who scored better would select less helpful music for self (self-handicap more) than participants who scored worse. Participants who scored better, however, did not select less helpful music for self than participants who scored worse. These results are contrary to most of the self-handicapping research which finds that participants who are not sure of how to replicate a successful performance are more likely to engage in self-handicapping prior to another similar performance (Berglas, 1987).

The fact that the present study was not able to replicate this basic finding of self-

handicapping suggests that either the phenomenon is not as robust as the literature seems to indicate, or the present study failed to create a salient non-contingent success condition. It was predicted that close comparison participants who scored better would select less helpful music for self (self-handicap) than participants paired with a stranger or close no comparison participants, because of the added evaluation apprehension from expecting a comparison with a relationship partner and the potential effect such a comparison might have on the relationship. Results, however, did not reveal a significant interaction between performance feedback and condition. Close comparison participants who scored better did not select less helpful music for self (self-handicap more) than strangers or close no comparison participants who scored better. Also contrary to predictions, close comparison participants who scored worse did not select more helpful music for self than strangers who scored worse or close no comparison participants who scored worse. Past self-handicapping research has found that when given failure feedback, participants chose more helpful music for self than participants who were given success feedback (Rhodewalt & Davison, 1986). Although the means were in the anticipated direction, with close comparison participants who scored worse selecting more helpful music for self than close no comparison participants who scored worse, participants in the stranger conditions who scored worse chose music that was almost exactly as helpful to self as the close comparison participants. These results therefore suggest that it is only the anticipation of a comparison of performances, and not who the other is, that might be affecting music choice when participants have scored worse. These results make sense according to the SEM model, as participants who initially scored worse would be expected to alter the performance conditions in a way that would result in a better performance outcome for self. However, according to the findings of other-enhancement, when uncertain about their ability to outperform a relevant comparison other (i.e., after scoring worse on a pretest), participants should be expected to choose less helpful music for self than when they were certain about their ability (i.e., after scoring better on a pretest). Therefore it is interesting that both strangers and close comparison participants chose more helpful music for self relative to the close no comparison participants, when presumably performance outcome would not be as important. This may be an indication that participants were not operating in terms of other-enhancement, but more in terms of SEM.

It was predicted that participants would choose more helpful music for a close other than for a stranger. However, close comparison participants did not choose more helpful music for the other than did participants paired with strangers. In line with the other-enhancement literature, it was predicted that participants who scored better would select less helpful music for the other than participants who scored worse. However, participants who scored better selected more helpful music for the other than did participants who scored worse, regardless of who they were paired with. Participants have been found to be less likely to help the other when the other performed worse. This suggests that participants selecting facilitating music for the other (other enhancing) may have been motivated by compassion, rather than by a desire to escape lack-of-ability attributions for a forthcoming failure, which may have to do with fact that they are selecting music for their relationship partner or an opposite sex person. It is possible then, that participants' tendencies to select facilitating music for the other may have been motivated by the perceived lack of threat from the other, rather than a desire to escape lack-of-ability attributions for a forthcoming failure.

Close comparison participants who scored worse were expected to select less helpful music for the other than either strangers or close no comparison participant who scored worse. This prediction was made according to the logic of the SEM model. However, close comparison participants who scored worse did not select less helpful music for the

other than either strangers or close no comparison participants who scored worse. Results also revealed that males did not choose more helpful music for the other than did females. This is contrary to other research (Eagly & Crowley, 1986) that has found that in general, men are more likely than women to offer assistance to another, especially when the other is female. Finally, close comparison females did not choose more helpful music for the other than did no comparison females, and close comparison males did not choose less helpful music for the other than did no comparison males. These results indicate that close males and females were almost equally helpful to the other when a comparison of performances was expected, and close males chose much more helpful music for the other than did close females when no comparison was expected. Males are possibly most helpful in the no comparison condition because they do not feel that this help could end up being a threat to their self-evaluation. Unfortunately, more data regarding questions of motivation and interpretation of the situation are needed before strong conclusions can be drawn. Future research should also focus on Aron, Aron, Tudor and Nelson's (1991) assertion that when the close other is included in one's self-concept, concern for the other does not conflict with concern for self.

Who the other was affected the perceived importance to self of performing well. It was predicted that participants would feel it more important to do well when performing an esteem-threatening task with a relationship partner than with a stranger. As expected, females felt it was more important to do well in the close comparison condition than in the stranger condition. However, contrary to expectations, males felt it was more important to do well in the stranger condition than in the close comparison condition. It was also predicted that participants would feel it more important to do well when a comparison of scores was expected than when a comparison was not expected. However, males and females did not feel it was more important to do well in the close comparison condition than in the no comparison condition. Follow up tests also revealed males felt it was more important than females to do well in the stranger condition, and females felt it was more important than males to do well in the close comparison condition.

These results suggest that females may have a greater desire to look competent to their relationship partner, than to look competent to a stranger, and therefore may indicate that females are more concerned about their relationship than men. It is easy to understand that females felt it was more important to do well when a comparison of performances was expected, because it is only in this condition that performances would be truly public (Berglas & Jones, 1978). In the no comparison condition, participants could potentially misrepresent their performance to their relationship partner as either better or worse depending on how their partner reported they did and how important they perceived it was to their partner to perform relatively better. The SEM model suggests that close participants who score worse than the other may decrease the relevance of the task in order to maintain self-evaluation. This may explain why close comparison males reported that doing well was less important to self than stranger males. Although not related to performance feedback in the present case, males in the close comparison conditions may be decreasing the importance to self (relevance) in order to avoid a potentially esteem threatening comparison with their relationship partner. This is theoretically important, as it would be evidence that these participants were engaging in anticipatory self-protective behavior, and is consistent with the SEM model.

It was hypothesized that because of greater familiarity, close participants would think the other placed a greater importance on doing well than would strangers. Consistent with predictions, results revealed that females did think that the other would feel it more important to do well in the close comparison condition than in the stranger condition. Results also revealed that when paired with strangers, males thought the other would feel

it significantly more important to do well than did females. This may just be another indication that the females in the stranger condition were not as concerned with the other as were males in the stranger condition. Results also indicated that in the stranger conditions, participants who scored worse thought the other would find it more important to do well than did participants who scored better. Scoring better than a stranger may be more easily accepted if participants believed that the stranger did not feel it as important to do well (Omoto & Mooney, 1992). On the other hand, consistent with SEM, it may be easier to maintain self-esteem when scoring worse than a stranger if the participant believed the other felt it was much more important to do well.

Conclusion

The present study provides evidence that there are potential conflicts between individuals' motivation to protect self-esteem and their motivation to maintain a close relationship which moderate their behavior in a potentially esteem threatening performance situation. SEM does not really make predictions about how an individual might behave prior to a performance or when anticipating a potentially esteem threatening performance, and the self-handicapping and other-enhancement literatures do not address the potential effects of anticipating a comparison of performances with a close other. The present research contributes to all three lines of literature and clearly provides a bridge between the literature on self-protection and the literature on interpersonal relationships. It is also methodologically significant that the present research brought in dating couples (and/or people involved in dating relationships) and had them participate in this experiment together. This methodology not only extends previous work on self-handicapping and other-enhancement, but also increases the experimental realism when participants are being asked to take into consideration a close other. The present research demonstrates that it is possible to interpret anticipatory self-protective behaviors, such as other-enhancement and self-handicapping, within the context of the dyad.

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