Seeking Self-Evaluative Feedback: The Interactive Role of Global Self-Esteem and Specific Self-Views

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People who verify a negative self-view expose themselves to criticism and rejection. Because people with low global self-esteem are hurt more by negative feedback than are people with high global self-esteem, the authors predicted that they would be less apt to verify a negative self-view in a more specific domain. Three investigations found support for this hypothesis. In all 3 investigations, high self-esteem participants sought (or tended to seek) self-verifying feedback, even if it was negative, but low self-esteem participants sought (or tended to seek) positive feedback, even if it was nonself-verifying. These findings show that low self-esteem people are especially concerned with self-protection and that global self-esteem and specific self-views interact to guide people's responses to self-evaluative feedback.

The research literature on individual differences in information-seeking behavior presents something of a paradox. On the one hand, there is evidence that people who feel bad about themselves are particularly disturbed by negative feedback and avoid it as a means of self-protection (e.g., Brown & Dutton, 1995a; Brown & Marshall, 2001; Dutton & Brown, 1997). On the other hand, there is evidence that people with negative self-views seek negative feedback as a means of verifying their negative self-appraisals (e.g., Swann, 1990, 1996). In this article, we attempt to resolve this paradox by suggesting that both perspectives capture part of the truth. To foreshadow our argument, we predict and show that global self-esteem and specific self-views interact to affect the seeking of evaluative feedback: High self-esteem (HSE) people verify their negative self-views, but low self-esteem (LSE) people do not. In the sections that follow, we present the theoretical rationale behind these predictions; afterwards, we report three studies designed to test them.

Self-Esteem and Reactions to Negative Feedback

Negative feedback hurts. People who encounter criticism, rejection, and failure often feel sad, ashamed of themselves, and upset. Everyone is susceptible to these feelings, but negative feedback produces greater emotional distress among LSE people than among HSE people. To illustrate, Brown and Dutton (1995a) led participants to succeed or fail at an intellectual task. Emotional reactions to success did not differ as a function of self-esteem, but LSE participants felt worse about themselves when they failed than did HSE participants. Subsequent research has replicated and extended this effect (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Dutton & Brown, 1997).

The two self-esteem groups also show different cognitive reactions to negative feedback. LSE people are less apt than HSE people to (a) make external attributions for failure (Blaine & Crocker, 1993), (b) belittle the importance of a trait they lack (Brown, Dutton, & Cook, 2001), and minimize the impact of failure by (c) exaggerating their superiority over others (Brown & Gallagher, 1992), or (d) emphasize their strengths in alternative domains (Baumeister, 1982; Brown & Smart, 1991; Dodgson & Wood, 1998; for related research, see Kernis, Brockner, & Frankel, 1989).

These different emotional and cognitive reactions to failure are accompanied by some important behavioral effects. Instead of actively exposing themselves to the pain of failure, rejection, and criticism, many LSE people adopt a cautious, self-protective approach to life (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Brown, 1998). For example, Josephs, Larrick, Steele, and Nisbett (1992) found that LSE people are more risk averse than are HSE people, and Tice (1991) reported that LSE people engage in self-handicapping as a means of protecting themselves from the pain of failure, whereas HSE people engage in self-handicapping as a means of augmenting the glow of success. Finally, Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, and Gaus (1994) found that LSE people eagerly compared themselves with another person when they thought the comparison would be favorable, but refrained from comparing themselves with another person when they suspected the comparison would be unfavorable. Each of these investigations, then, provides evidence that LSE people are more apt than HSE people to protect themselves from the pain of negative feedback (see also Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993; Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989, 1991).

To summarize, LSE people are hurt more by negative feedback than are HSE people. They experience greater emotional distress and they often fail to engage in efforts to offset the pain they feel (see also Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002). In large part, these effects occur because negative feedback means something different to LSE people than to HSE people. To HSE people, negative feedback is an isolated event that, at its worst, simply means one lacks a particular quality. To LSE people, negative feedback means one is globally inadequate—that one is a bad and

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unworthy person (Brown, 1998). Consequently, LSE people tend to play it safe in life, actively avoiding situations that might expose them to negative feedback.

Self-Verification Theory

Self-verification theory presents a somewhat different perspective on these issues. In a research program spanning more than 25 years, Swann and his associates have shown that people prefer to interact with others who view them as they view themselves, and that this is just as true for people who view themselves negatively as for those who view themselves positively. Evidence supporting these assertions comes from a variety of sources. In laboratory studies, people with negative self-views are less interested in interacting with a person who evaluates them positively than are people with positive self-views (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). In more naturalistic settings, college students with negative self-views express a greater desire to remain roommates with someone who views them negatively than with someone who views them positively (cited in Swann, 1990, p. 419), and marriage partners are happiest when their spouses view them as they view themselves, even when their own self-views are negative (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). In short, there is considerable evidence to suggest that people prefer to interact with those who appraise them as they appraise themselves (see also Joiner, 1995; Joiner & Metalsky, 1995).

Toward a Rapprochement: Distinguishing Global Self-Esteem From Specific Self-Views

Differentiating global self-esteem and specific self-views may clarify the manner in which self-evaluations affect the seeking of self-evaluative feedback. Global self-esteem refers to the way people feel about themselves, whereas specific self-views refer to the way people appraise their particular abilities, talents, and attributes (Brown, 1998; Brown et al., 2001). Although the two constructs are positively correlated, Dutton and Brown (1997) recently found that they have independent correlates. In their research, global self-esteem, but not specific self-views, predicted people's *emotional* reactions to negative feedback, and specific self-views, but not global self-esteem, predicted people's *cognitive* reactions to negative feedback. In consideration of these findings, Dutton and Brown concluded that both constructs play an important role when people confront evaluative feedback.

The manner in which these constructs influence self-verification processes is currently unclear. At one time, Swann argued that "self-verification processes are presumably driven by specific self-views rather than global self-esteem" (Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989, p. 783). Subsequently, he changed his position, arguing instead that "both global self-regard . . . and specific self-views . . . guide self-verification strivings" (Swann et al., 1994, p. 857). This uncertainty at the theoretical level is accompanied by inconsistency at the empirical level. Some investigations have found that specific self-views, not global self-esteem, influence self-verification processes (Swann et al., 1989), whereas other studies have found the opposite to be true (Morling & Epstein, 1997). In short, there is currently no consensus with regard to which construct plays a more influential role when people seek evaluative feedback.

The present research seeks to clarify this issue by proposing that the two constructs interact to affect self-verification processes. In particular, we believe that HSE people will verify a negative self-view but that LSE people will not. This basis for this prediction resides in the way each self-esteem group handles negative feedback. People who verify a negative self-view expose themselves to the pain of criticism and, perhaps, rejection. Because HSE people are adept at neutralizing the negative impact of negative feedback, HSE people with negative self-views can afford to seek negative, self-verifying feedback without feeling devastated. In contrast, LSE people deal ineffectively with negative feedback and find it to be emotionally distressing. As a consequence, we believe that LSE people with negative self-views will refrain from verifying a negative self-view. In essence, consistent with evidence that LSE people are risk averse and self-protective, we believe they will protect themselves from the potential pain of criticism and rejection by avoiding negative feedback.

As shown in Figure 1, these predictions translate into a three-way interaction in an analysis of variance (ANOVA) design. The left-hand side of the figure shows that HSE participants are expected to exhibit the usual self-verification effect: HSE participants with positive self-views preferentially seek positive feedback and HSE participants with negative self-views preferentially seek negative feedback. The right-hand side of the figure shows that LSE participants show only a main effect for feedback valence. Regardless of their self-views, LSE participants preferentially seek positive feedback. We conducted three investigations to test this hypothesis.

Study 1

Method

Participants. The participants were 98 female undergraduates attending the University of Washington (UW). They were drawn from the top or bottom thirds of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scale, which had been administered earlier to a larger number of UW undergraduates. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale is a widely used measure of self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1989; Rosenberg, 1979). It focuses on general feelings toward the self without reference to any specific quality or attribute. Participants complete the scale by indicating their agreement with each of 10 items (e.g., "I take a positive view of myself"; "All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure") on 4-point scales ($0 = $ *strongly disagree,* $3 = $ *strongly agree*). After reversing the scoring for five negatively worded items, a total self-esteem score is found by summing the 10 responses. The theoretical range of scores with this procedure is 0–30. The present sample was made up of 48 LSE participants ($M = 19.44$) and 50 HSE participants ($M = 28.56$). The experimenters were unaware of participants' self-esteem levels throughout the experimental procedure.

Materials and procedure. Pairs of unacquainted participants signed up for an experiment entitled "Getting Acquainted." They were greeted by a female experimenter who explained that they would be having a brief conversation with each other. Afterward, they would complete some questionnaires regarding their perception of the other person, and receive information about the other person's perception of them. To protect their privacy, all participants were then assigned a number to be used on all forms and questionnaires.

The participants then indicated, by questionnaire, the extent to which they thought eight traits described them ($1 = $ *not at all,* $7 = $ *very much*). Embedded in this questionnaire were four target items: sociable, comfortable in social situations, shy, anxious in social situations. After reversing
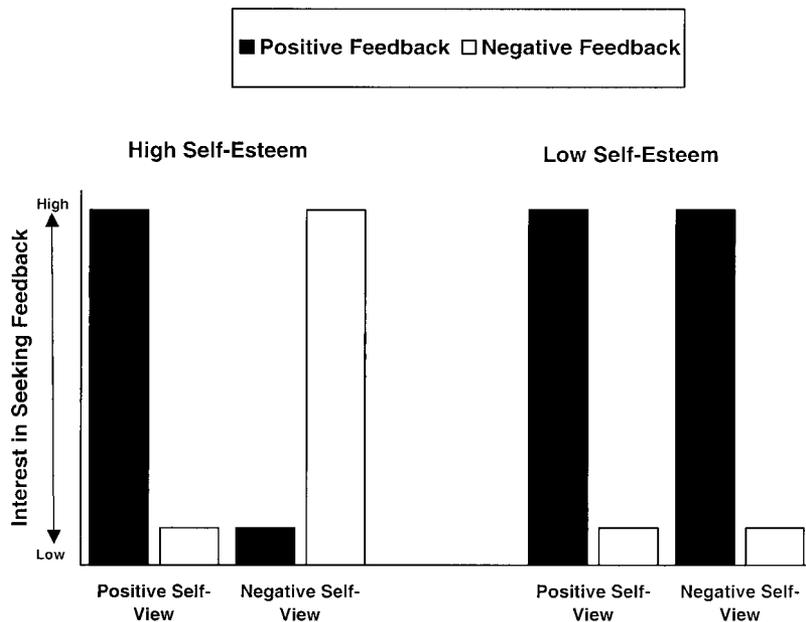
Figure 1. Schematic representation of the predicted three-way interaction between self-esteem, self-views, and feedback valence.

the scoring for the two negatively worded items, a summary score was obtained by summing across the four descriptors ($\alpha = .76$).

The participants then engaged in a 10–15-min structured conversation. To facilitate the interaction, the experimenter provided suggested topics (e.g., What is your favorite thing to do in your spare time?; If you could make one change in the world, what would it be and how would you do it?). When the conversation ended, the participants were taken to separate rooms and instructed to write a paragraph or two conveying their impression of their partner's social competence.

The experimenter collected these impressions and returned a few minutes later to show each participant the paragraph (allegedly) written by the other participant. In fact, these handwritten paragraphs were prepared in advance. The evaluations were modeled after ones developed by Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992). The positive evaluation read as follows:

This person seems socially self-confident. She appears at ease with people she doesn't know very well. She seems to have little doubt about her social competence. That's pretty much all I can tell about her from her conversation.

The negative evaluation read as follows:

From talking with this person she appears to be ill at ease in social situations. There are probably times when she is around other people and just doesn't know what to do or say. There are times when she likes being around people, but in some social situations she is uncomfortable and anxious.

Random assignment to conditions was used to determine whether the participants received the positive or negative evaluation.

After receiving this feedback, all participants completed a questionnaire. As a check on the effectiveness of the manipulation, the first item asked the participants to rate their partner's evaluation of their social competence (1 = *very negative*, 7 = *very positive*); to assess their current emotional state, participants indicated how proud, pleased with themselves, ashamed, or humiliated they were feeling (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*); a final item

on the questionnaire asked the participants to indicate how interested they were in getting to know the other person better (1 = *not very much*, 7 = *very much*). When both participants had completed the questionnaire, they were reunited. They were then debriefed, thanked, and excused.

Results and Discussion

Scores on the trait questionnaire were divided at the median ($Mdn = 21.5$) and the data were analyzed using a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Self-Esteem × Self-View × Feedback) ANOVA.[1]

Manipulation check. As expected, participants receiving positive feedback judged the feedback to be more positive ($M = 5.88$) than did participants receiving negative feedback ($M = 4.01$), $F(1, 59) = 53.04$, $p < .001$.[2] Nonsignificant interactions indicated that this effect was not qualified by self-esteem or self-view (both $ps > .20$). There was, however, a main effect of self-esteem, such that HSE participants generally rated the feedback they received as more positive ($M = 5.09$) than did LSE participants ($M = 4.30$), $F(1, 59) = 4.34$, $p < .05$. Because this rather modest effect did not vary across experimental conditions, it does not bear on the question of whether the two self-esteem groups respond differently to different types of feedback

Feelings of self-worth. We hypothesized that negative feedback would engender greater emotional distress among LSE par-

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[1] Scores on the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scale were moderately correlated with scores on the perceived social competence measure ($r = .35$, $p < 01$). The resulting cell sizes were as follows: LSE/negative trait, $N = 27$; LSE/positive trait, $N = 7$; HSE/negative trait, $N = 11$; HSE/positive trait, $N = 22$.

[2] Because of a clerical error, the manipulation check was omitted from the questionnaires of 31 of the participants.

ticipants than among HSE participants. A significant Self-Esteem × Feedback interaction supported this prediction, $F(1, 90) = 7.48$, $p < .01$. As shown in Figure 2, feedback did not influence how HSE participants felt about themselves ($t < 1$), but LSE participants felt worse about themselves after receiving negative feedback than after receiving positive feedback, $t(90) = 3.28$, $p < .01$. Looked at somewhat differently, the two self-esteem groups did not differ in their emotional reactions to positive feedback ($t < 1$), but LSE participants felt worse after receiving negative feedback than did HSE participants, $t(90) = 3.03$, $p < .01$. Neither the Self-View × Feedback interaction, nor the three-way (Self-Esteem × Self-View × Feedback) interaction even approached significance (both Fs < 1). In short, replicating prior research (Dutton & Brown, 1997), the data show that self-esteem, not specific self-views, predicted people's emotional reactions to evaluative feedback.

Feedback seeking. The participants also indicated how interested they were in getting to know their partner better. The only effect to approach significance was the three-way interaction, $F(1, 90) = 3.45$, $p = .066$. As shown in Figure 3, the form of the interaction was generally (though not entirely) consistent with the experimental predictions we presented in Figure 1. HSE participants showed the usual self-verification effect: HSE participants with positive self-views preferred positive evaluators to negative evaluators and HSE participants with negative self-views preferred negative evaluators to positive evaluators. LSE participants showed a different pattern. LSE participants with positive self-views showed no preference either way and those with negative self-views preferred positive evaluators to negative evaluators. This last finding is most important, as it suggests that LSE people will not verify a negative self-view. However, none of these simple effects was significant, indicating that the data should be regarded as preliminary and in need of replication.
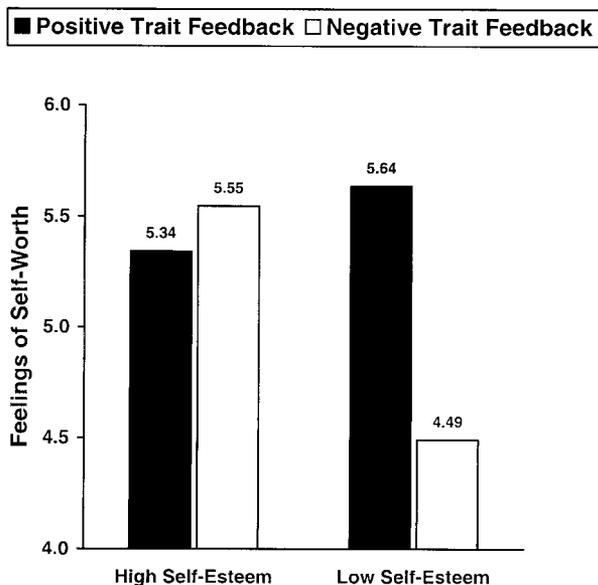
Study 2

Because the effects in Study 1 were rather moderate in magnitude, we decided to conduct a replication using a different procedure. Self-verification effects have been tested in a variety of contexts. As in Study 1, some studies have assessed whether people choose to interact with someone who has evaluated them in a self-verifying or nonself-verifying manner (e.g., Swann et al., 1989, Study 3). Other studies have examined whether people seek self-verifying or nonself-verifying feedback from the same interaction partner (Swann & Read, 1981). To illustrate, Swann and Read (1981) led participants to believe they were going to interact with another person. The participants were then given the chance to learn what kind of impression their interaction partner had formed of them on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire they had completed earlier. The participants preferentially selected self-verifying feedback. Participants who viewed themselves as being assertive sought feedback pertaining to their assertiveness, whereas those who viewed themselves as being unassertive sought feedback pertaining to their lack of assertiveness. A similar pattern occurred with respect to emotionality.

The findings from Study 1 suggest that this pattern might characterize HSE people but not LSE people. Study 2 was designed to examine this possibility. Using the procedures developed by Swann and Read (1981), we had participants select self-verifying or nonself-verifying feedback from a single interaction partner. We predicted that LSE people would seek positive feedback (even if it was not self-verifying) and that HSE people would seek self-verifying feedback (even if it was negative).

Method

Participants. Eighty-eight females attending UW served as participants in this investigation. As in Study 1, they were drawn from the top or bottom thirds of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scale, which had been administered earlier to a larger number of UW undergraduates. Forty-three of the participants were classified as having LSE ($M = 18.67$) and 45 were classified as having HSE ($M = 27.56$). The experimenters were unaware of participants' self-esteem levels throughout the experimental procedure.

Materials and procedure. The procedures were quite similar to those used in Study 1. Pairs of unacquainted participants signed up for an experiment entitled "Getting Acquainted." They were greeted by a female experimenter who explained that they would be having a brief conversation with one another. Afterward, they would complete some questionnaires regarding their perception of the other person, and receive information about the other person's perception of them.

The participants then completed a questionnaire, in which they indicated the extent to which several traits described them ($1 = $ *not at all*, $7 = $ *very much*). Embedded in this questionnaire were four target items: sociable, comfortable in social situations, shy, anxious in social situations. After reversing the scoring for the two negatively worded items, a summary score was obtained by summing across the four descriptors ($\alpha = .73$).

The participants then engaged in a 10–15-min structured conversation. When the conversation ended, the participants were taken to separate rooms and were given a one-page questionnaire. The instructions at the top of the questionnaire directed the participants to take a moment to think about their interaction partner. They were then asked to write a brief paragraph or two in response to the following questions: "What about this person leads you to believe she would be *comfortable* at a party and other social occasions?" and "What about this person leads you to believe she

Figure 2. Emotional reactions as a function of self-esteem and feedback valence: Study 1.

High Self-Esteem
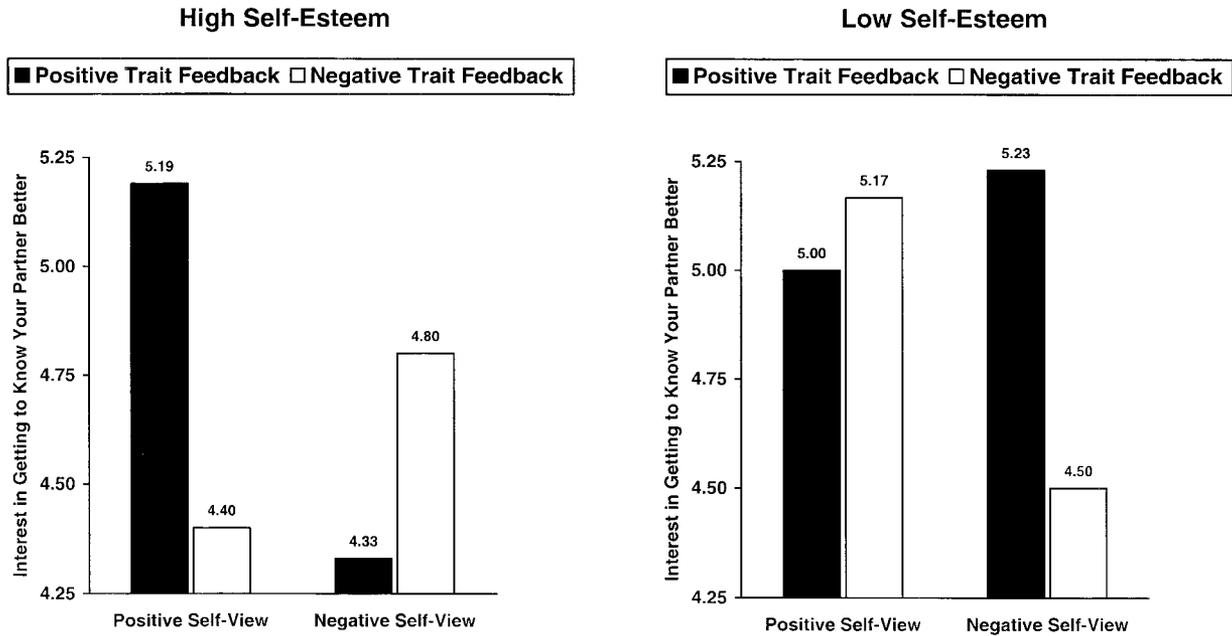
Low Self-Esteem

Figure 3. Feedback seeking as a function of self-esteem, specific self-views, and feedback valence: Study 1.

would be *uncomfortable* at a party and other social occasions?" The participants were given 10 min to write down their answers.

When they had finished writing their paragraphs, the experimenter returned and collected the questionnaires. The participants were then told that time was running out and they would only have enough time to see their partner's answers to one of the two questions. They then indicated (in writing) which of the two questions they wished to peruse. After each participant had made this decision, they were reunited in a common room, and were thoroughly debriefed and thanked.

Results and Discussion

Scores on the trait questionnaire were divided at the median ($Mdn = 20.5$), and participants' preferences were analyzed using a 2 (self-esteem) $\times$ 2 (self-view) logistic regression. The analysis indicated a main effect of self-view (Wald's test of significance = 4.96, $p < .05$) and a significant Self-Esteem $\times$ Self-View interaction (Wald's test of significance = 10.49, $p = .001$). As shown in Table 1, the interaction reflects the fact that HSE participants displayed the usual self-verification effect, but LSE participants did not.

Simple effects tests confirmed these impressions. Among HSE participants, information seeking depended on one's self-view, $\chi^2(1, N = 45) = 15.85$, $p < .001$. HSE participants with positive self-views preferentially sought feedback that they were sociable ($Z = 3.14$, $p < .01$) and HSE participants with negative self-views preferentially sought feedback that they were unsociable ($Z = 2.52$, $p < .01$). In contrast, self-views did not influence information seeking among LSE participants, $\chi^2(1, N = 43) < 1$. Instead, regardless of their self-views, LSE participants sought information that they were sociable rather than unsociable ($Z = 2.29$, $p < .025$). Finally, there were no self-esteem differences among participants with positive self-views, $\chi^2(1, N = 40) = 2.55$, $p > .10$,

but there were self-esteem differences among participants with negative self-views, $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 10.54$, $p = .001$. This latter finding is of particular importance, as it indicates that only HSE participants verified a negative self-view.

Study 3

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 provide convergent evidence that LSE people are reluctant to verify a negative self-view. These findings fit well with evidence that LSE people are more bothered by negative feedback than are HSE people, and that LSE people are more self-protective and risk averse than are HSE people. These findings also qualify (but do not contradict) self-verification theory, by suggesting that self-verification processes are not sim-

Table 1
Interest in Seeking Feedback That One is Sociable and Unsociable as a Function of Self-Esteem and Self-View: Study 2

Feedback	High self-esteem		Low self-esteem	
	High sociability	Low sociability	High sociability	Low sociability
Positive feedback (comfortable in social situations)	21	4	8	20
Negative feedback (uncomfortable in social situations)	5	15	6	9
% seeking positive feedback	81	21	57	69

ply driven by people's specific self-views, but rather by the interaction between global self-esteem and specific self-views.

Several issues remained to be addressed. First, we have examined only a single self-view: perceived sociability. Although this is the trait used most often in self-verification research, it is not the only self-view for which people seek feedback. We addressed this issue in Study 3 by including a broader range of traits.

Our use of median splits to classify participants as having positive self-views or negative self-views also poses interpretive problems. Most (though not all) self-verification studies use more extreme groups (e.g., top or bottom 33%) when testing for self-verification effects. We agree that the theory is best tested with extreme groups, but our sample sizes have been too small to allow us to pursue this strategy. We corrected this deficiency in Study 3 by testing a larger number of participants, enabling us to use more extreme cut-off points.

In Study 3 we also examined whether LSE people would be more interested in seeking negative feedback if they knew it came from a person who liked them in a general way. This prediction assumes that receiving criticism from someone who approves of us in a general way is less aversive than is receiving criticism from someone who generally disapproves of us. To the extent that this is so, we might expect that LSE people are more willing to verify a negative trait when the person delivering the negative feedback expresses a general liking for them (see Swann et al., 1994, for a related discussion).

To our knowledge, only one previous investigation has addressed this issue. In a study published after our research was conducted, Rudich and Vallacher (1999, Experiment 1) found that LSE participants did seek negative feedback from evaluators who indicated that they liked them in a general way. It is somewhat difficult to interpret these findings, however, because Rudich and Vallacher measured self-esteem using the Texas Social Behavior Inventory (Helmreich & Stapp, 1974) instead of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scale. The Texas Social Behavior Inventory measures perceived competence in social situations (a specific self-view), not global self-esteem (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Swann et al., 1987). Consequently, Rudich and Vallacher's findings may simply mean that people with low perceived social competence (a self-view) seek negative feedback from positive evaluators. To clarify this issue, the present research included independent measures of self-esteem and specific self-views, in addition to varying the general and specific feedback participants received.

Method

Participants. The participants were 290 female undergraduates attending UW. They participated in exchange for extra credit in various psychology courses. As in our two previous studies, they were drawn from the top and bottom thirds of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scale. A total of 151 participants were classified as having LSE ($M = 18.78$) and 139 were classified as having HSE ($M = 28.48$).

Materials and procedure. The materials and procedure were similar to those used in Study 1, with two exceptions. First, three different self-views were examined in this study. Depending on experimental condition, the trait questionnaire included items pertaining to creativity (inventive, creative, unimaginative, uncreative), sociability (sociable, comfortable in social situations, shy, anxious in social situations) or physical fitness (athletic, physically active, interested in keeping fit, unathletic). After reversing the scoring for the negatively worded items, a total score was found by summing across the four descriptors.

The second change was that the participants completed (and then received) both a general evaluation and an evaluation of their specific self-view. In all experimental conditions, all participants indicated their global liking for their partner by checking one of two statements: "I think I would enjoy spending time with her" versus "I don't think I would enjoy spending time with her." The second pair of statements varied depending on experimental condition. Participants in the creativity condition evaluated their partner's creativity ("I thought [didn't think] she seemed very creative"); those in the sociability condition evaluated their partner's sociability ("I thought [didn't think] she seemed comfortable and poised"), and those in the fitness condition evaluated their partner's fitness ("I thought [didn't think] she seemed athletic and fit").

After the participants had made their ratings, the experimenter collected them and returned a few minutes later to show each participant the questionnaire (allegedly) completed by the other participant. In fact, these questionnaires were constructed in advance. Using random assignment to conditions, participants received either positive or negative general feedback (i.e., the other participant [allegedly] liked them or didn't like them) and positive or negative trait feedback (i.e., the other participant thought they were creative [sociable or physically fit] or didn't think they possessed these qualities). After receiving this information, the participants were given another questionnaire and indicated how interested they were in getting to know the other person better ($1 = not\ very\ much$, $7 = very\ much$). After these statements were collected, the participants were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

Results

Main analyses. For each self-view, we divided the distribution into thirds. We then analyzed the data using a $3 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Self-View $\times$ Self-Esteem $\times$ Specific Feedback $\times$ General Feedback) ANOVA.[3] The ANOVA revealed several lower order effects, including a main effect of general feedback, $F(1, 266) = 28.15$, $p < .001$, and a General Feedback $\times$ Specific Feedback interaction, $F(1, 266) = 5.76$, $p < .05$. The interaction reflects the fact that, across self-esteem levels and specific self-views, participants tended to seek positive feedback regarding a trait when the evaluator liked them in a general way ($Ms = 5.31$ and 4.90, for positive specific feedback and negative specific feedback, respectively), $t(266) = 1.66$, $p < .10$, but negative feedback regarding a trait when the evaluator did not like them in a general way ($Ms = 3.99$ and 4.41, for positive specific feedback and negative specific feedback, respectively), $t(266) = 1.73$, $p < .10$. In essence, the type of specific feedback sought matched the type of general feedback received. Participants sought positive feedback from someone who liked them and negative feedback from someone who disliked them.[4]

These effects were qualified by three higher order interactions: A Self-View $\times$ General Feedback $\times$ Specific Feedback interaction, $F(2, 266) = 4.61$, $p < .05$; a Self-Esteem $\times$ Self-View $\times$ Specific Feedback interaction, $F(2, 266) = 10.03$, $p = .001$; and a

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[3] Preliminary analyses indicated that self-view type (e.g., creativity, sociability, or physical fitness) did not interact with any of the other experimental variables, and this factor was ignored in all further analyses.

[4] Because these analyses collapse across self-esteem and self-views, they do not provide any evidence for self-verification of negative traits.

four-way effect, $F(2, 266) = 5.94$, $p < .005$. The three-way Self-Esteem × Self-View × Specific Feedback interaction replicates our previous research. Inspection of Figure 4 shows that, as before, HSE participants exhibited signs of self-verification, but LSE participants did not. A simple Self-View × Specific Feedback ANOVA conducted using only HSE participants revealed a significant interaction, $F(2, 133) = 4.34$, $p = .01$. HSE participants with positive self-views tended to prefer a positive evaluator to a negative evaluator ($p = .07$), HSE participants with negative self-views preferred a negative evaluator to a positive evaluator ($p < .05$), and HSE participants with moderate self-views showed no preference either way ($p > .25$). These findings are as predicted by self-verification theory.

No such pattern emerged among LSE participants. Although the simple Self-View × Specific Feedback interaction approached significance, $F(2, 145) = 2.93$, $p = .06$, the form of the interaction was not consistent with self-verification theory. LSE participants with positive and moderate self-views showed no preference for either evaluator (both $ps > .25$), and LSE participants with negative self-views preferred a positive evaluator to a negative evaluator ($p < .05$). This last finding is of special interest, because instead of choosing negative, self-verifying feedback, LSE participants with negative self-views chose positive, nonself-verifying feedback.

As noted earlier, the three-way interaction we have been discussing was further qualified by a higher order, four-way interaction. Perusal of the data in Table 2 suggests that this occurred because the three-way interaction was more evident when general feedback was negative than when it was positive. Simple effects tests conducted within each level of general feedback confirmed this impression. For participants who received positive general feedback, the only effect to reach significance was a main effect

for specific feedback. Regardless of their self-esteem level or specific self-view, participants preferred positive specific feedback ($M = 5.31$) to negative specific feedback ($M = 4.86$), $F(1, 143) = 7.89$, $p < .01$. Not all groups demonstrated this pattern, but none deviated significantly from it.

A different pattern emerged among participants who received negative general feedback (see bottom half of Table 2). Here, the three-way (Self-Esteem × Self-View × Specific Feedback) interaction was highly significant, $F(2, 123) = 11.43$, $p < .001$. Simple effects tests conducted within each self-esteem group revealed no significant effects for LSE participants (all $ps > .20$), but a significant Self-View × Specific Feedback interaction among HSE participants, $F(2, 55) = 10.50$, $p < .001$. As before, this effect reflects the fact that HSE participants with positive self-views tended to prefer a positive evaluator to a negative evaluator and HSE participants with negative self-views preferred a negative evaluator to a positive evaluator.

Supplemental analyses. Complex factorial designs can sometimes obscure important effects because of insufficient power. Because the behavior of participants with negative self-views is critical to our research, we supplemented our main analyses with two additional analyses. First, we conducted a 2 × 2 (General Feedback × Specific Feedback) ANOVA using only LSE participants with negative self-views. The ANOVA revealed two significant effects. First, there was a main effect of general feedback, indicating that LSE participants with negative self-views preferred positive general feedback ($M = 5.00$) to negative general feedback ($M = 3.86$), $F(1, 71) = 11.09$, $p = .001$. Second, there was a main effect of specific feedback, indicating that LSE participants with negative self-views preferred positive specific feedback ($M = 4.91$) to negative specific feedback ($M = 4.10$), $F(1, 71) = 7.46$, $p < .01$. In short, LSE participants with negative self-views
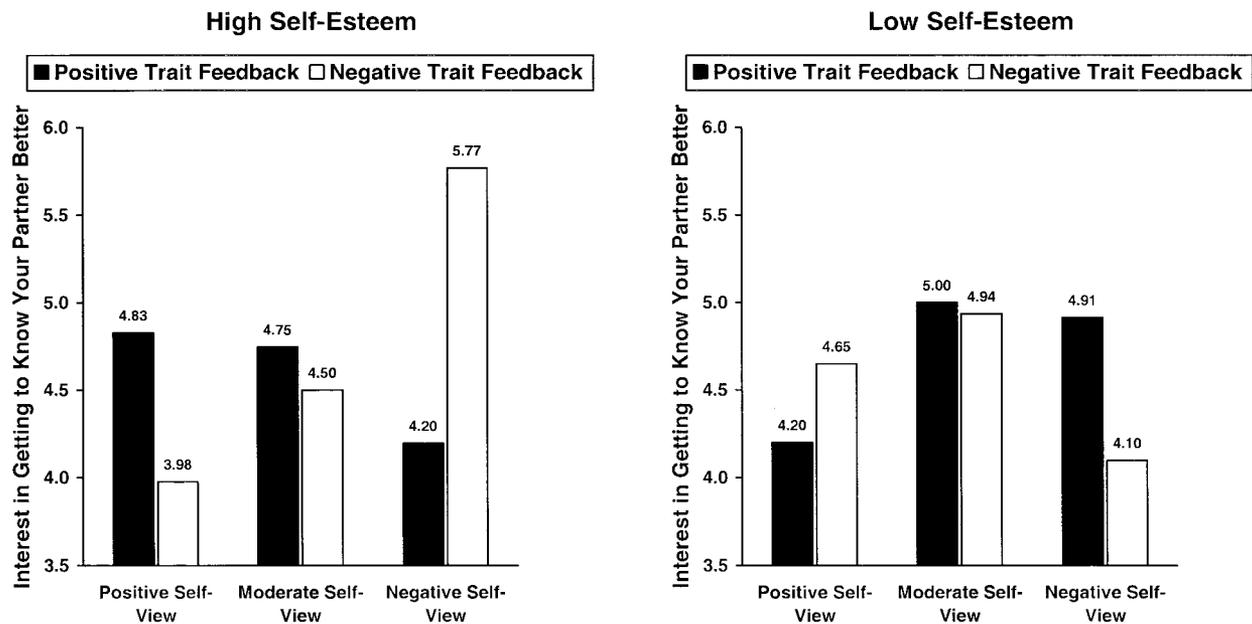
Figure 4. Feedback seeking as a function of self-esteem, specific self-views, and specific feedback valence: Study 3.

Table 2
*Interest in Getting to Know an Interaction Partner Better as a Function of Self-Esteem,
Self-View, General Feedback, and Specific Feedback: Study 3*

Feedback	High self-esteem			Low self-esteem		
	Positive self-view (N = 74)	Moderate self-view (N = 39)	Negative self-view (N = 26)	Positive self-view (N = 31)	Moderate self-view (N = 45)	Negative self-view (N = 75)
Positive general feedback						
Positive specific feedback	5.18	4.89	5.89	4.40	6.00	5.48
Negative specific feedback	4.19	5.00	5.29	5.00	5.42	4.53
Negative general feedback						
Positive specific feedback	4.47	4.60	2.50	4.00	4.00	4.35
Negative specific feedback	3.77	4.00	6.25	4.30	4.46	3.67

Note. Values range from 1 to 7; higher numbers equal greater interest in getting to know partner better.

showed no evidence of self-verification. Instead, at both the general and specific level, they preferred positive, nonself-verifying feedback to negative, self-verifying feedback.

We conducted a similar analysis using only HSE participants with negative self-views. Here the ANOVA revealed a highly significant General Feedback × Specific Feedback interaction, $F(1, 22) = 13.35$, $p = .001$. The interaction indicates that HSE participants verified a negative self-view when the evaluator expressed a general disliking for them but not when their interaction partner liked them in a general way. Said differently, HSE participants with negative self-views engaged in self-verification when general feedback was negative but not when it was positive.

Discussion

Despite the complex, four-way interaction, the data reveal some important details about the self-evaluation process. First, there was no evidence that LSE participants verified a negative self-view. Instead, LSE participants with negative self-views sought positive feedback not negative feedback. Moreover, this was true for both general feedback and specific feedback. These findings replicate and extend our earlier results, providing further evidence that LSE people avoid negative, self-relevant feedback.

In contrast, HSE participants did show signs of self-verification. HSE participants with positive self-views preferred to interact with someone who appraised them positively and, more importantly, HSE participants with negative self-views preferred to interact with someone who appraised them negatively, provided the partner also disliked them in a general way. Several factors may explain why HSE participants with negative self-views preferred positive, nonself-verifying feedback if it came from someone who liked them, but negative, self-verifying feedback if it came from someone who disliked them. One possibility is that general feedback is more important to HSE people than is specific feedback. If a person likes them in a general way, HSE people with negative self-views may eschew self-verification in favor of self-enhancement. Another possibility is that HSE people with negative self-views avoid inauthentic positive feedback from a person who dislikes them because they regard the person as being insincere

and ingratiating. Finally, HSE people with negative self-views may be trying to win over a person who evaluates them in a consistently negative manner. Future research could examine these possibilities by considering both the general level of expressed liking and the valence of the specific feedback being conveyed (Rudich & Vallacher, 1999).

General Discussion

Previous research has painted a rather contradictory picture regarding individual differences in self-evaluation. One body of research shows that LSE people are *hurt* more by negative feedback than are HSE people and avoid it in an effort to protect themselves from emotional pain (for reviews, see Baumeister et al., 1989; Brown, 1998). Another body of research suggests that people with negative self-views seek and embrace negative feedback as a means of verifying their self-image (Swann, 1990, 1996). In this research, we attempted to reconcile these competing views by suggesting that global self-esteem and specific self-views interact to predict feedback seeking-behavior. In particular, we predicted that HSE people would verify a negative self-view, but that LSE people would not.

The data we collected generally supported this prediction. In Study 1, negative interpersonal feedback led LSE people to feel particularly bad about themselves, and LSE participants with negative self-views showed no desire to interact with someone who evaluated them negatively. In Study 2, LSE participants with negative self-views sought positive, non self-verifying feedback from an interaction partner. In Study 3, LSE people with negative self-views preferred to interact with someone who evaluated them positively with respect to both a general evaluation and the specific evaluation of their self-views. In short, LSE participants with negative self-views consistently preferred positive feedback, even thought it was inconsistent with their self-views. These findings, which were obtained using two different procedures developed by self-verification researchers, suggest that LSE people are reluctant to verify a negative self-view.

It might be argued that the participants we have classified as having LSE did not really have LSE in an absolute sense, and that

those who score lower in self-esteem would seek negative feedback. This argument specifies a curvilinear relationship between self-esteem and self-verification of negative traits. Among people with negative self-views, those with HSE seek negative feedback, those with medium self-esteem seek positive feedback, and those with very LSE seek negative feedback. We aren't aware of any theoretical basis for making such a prediction, but we decided to address this issue empirically by reanalyzing the data from Study 3. Using only participants who scored in the bottom 10% of the self-esteem distribution, we found a strong main effect of general feedback, $F(1, 16) = 16.95$, $p = .001$, and a strong main effect of specific feedback, $F(1, 16) = 28.02$, $p < .001$. In both cases, the positive evaluator was strongly preferred over the negative evaluator. Apparently, even participants with extreme LSE avoid negative evaluators.[5]

HSE people did, however, display evidence of self-verification. HSE participants with positive self-views consistently sought positive feedback and HSE participants with negative self-views sought negative feedback, although Study 3 found that this was true only when it is accompanied by a negative overall evaluation. Considering that only HSE participants verified a negative self-view, many readers may wonder why self-verification researchers have so consistently found that people verify their negative self-views. Several factors are probably operating here. First, as noted elsewhere, most people have HSE (Baumeister et al., 1989; Swann, 1990). This means that in an unselected sample, more participants will have HSE than LSE. Because HSE people do verify a negative self-view, these studies should find evidence of self-verification. This should occur, however, only when participants assume the evaluator has formed an overall negative impression of them. Although we have no data on the issue, we suspect this is probably the case in the typical self-verification study. When someone tells us we are socially awkward or lack creativity, we are apt to assume that the person isn't all that fond of us in general. This perception sets up the conditions under which HSE people verify a negative trait.

Methodological factors may also have played a role. Although we modeled our experimental procedures after ones developed by Swann (Swann & Read, 1981; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992), the situations we constructed differed from the usual self-verification situation in an important respect. In our investigations, participants were evaluated by someone they had already met and the feedback they received or sought was (allegedly) based on an interaction they had already had. In many (though not all) self-verification studies, participants are evaluated by someone they have not met, and the feedback they receive or seek is (allegedly) based on responses to a questionnaire they had completed earlier or a speech they had given. Consequently, whereas our participants chose to interact further with someone they already knew, participants in most self-verification studies choose whether to interact with someone they have yet to meet.

How might these differences have affected our results? First, our participants had already gained a wealth of information about their partner, but the only thing participants in the usual self-verification study know about their potential partner is how their partner evaluated them. It is reasonable to expect that the impact of the evaluation would be diluted in our experimental situation relative to the usual self-verification study. Our participants may also have had less at stake than participants in the usual self-verification study. Choosing whether to interact further with someone we already know may represent a less consequential decision than deciding whether to meet someone at all. To the extent that this is so, the pragmatic consequences of acquiring self-verifying feedback may have been relatively low in our investigations.

When considering these issues, it's important to bear in mind that they seem to have differentially affected LSE people and HSE people. HSE people showed the usual self-verification effect, so the differences we are discussing appear to have had a greater impact on the decisions LSE people made than on the ones HSE people made. One way to understand this process is to conceive of information seeking in terms of a costs–benefits analysis (Brown, 1990; Brown & Dutton, 1995b; Dunning, 1995; Trope & Efrat, 1994; Trope & Pomerantz, 1998). The decision to seek evaluative feedback represents a compromise between the feedback's informational value and its affective value. Negative feedback can be useful, but it also produces emotional distress. Because LSE people find negative feedback to be particularly painful, they probably give greater weight to the feedback's affective value and seek negative feedback only when its informational value is high. This balance is less of a concern for HSE people. They handle negative feedback well so they can seek negative information even when its utility is low. Future research should examine whether LSE people are, in fact, more sensitive than HSE people to the utility of evaluative feedback.

The behavior of LSE participants with positive self-views may be relevant to this issue. Unlike their counterparts with negative self-views, LSE participants with positive self-views did not preferentially seek positive feedback. In fact, although the effect never reached significance, they were somewhat more inclined to seek negative feedback than positive feedback. Because they are not confirming a negative self-view, this finding cannot be explained within self-verification theory. It may, however, indicate that positive self-views function as a resource that can be used to offset the pain of negative feedback (for a related discussion, see Dutton & Brown, 1997; Steele, 1998).

In this regard, it would have been helpful if we had included measures that tapped participants' cognitive and emotional reactions to evaluative feedback, and then related these reactions to information-seeking behavior. Our theoretical analysis predicts that participants' emotional reactions (such as those demonstrated in Study 1) would have been more closely linked to their interaction choices than would their cognitive reactions. Future research should examine this possibility directly.

Future research should also examine whether our findings pertain to close, intimate personal relationships. We only studied situations in which people are getting to know another person. LSE

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[5] In a related vein, it might be argued that we failed to include participants with extremely negative self-views. In this regard, we note that some self-verification studies use a median split on self-views (Swann & Read, 1981), some use a more extreme division (Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992), and some treat self-views as a continuous variable (Swann et al., 1994). Thus, our use of a median split in Studies 1 and 2, and a more extreme cutoff in Study 3, is consistent with prior research and probably cannot explain why our LSE participants showed no interest in verifying a negative self-view.

people may prefer to become good friends or romantically involved with others who appraise them negatively. A similar point has been made about depressed individuals. There is evidence that depressed individuals create and gravitate toward rejecting interpersonal relationships (Coyne, 1976; Rosenblatt & Greenberg, 1988, 1991; Wenzlaff & Prohaska, 1989), and there has even been some speculation that this represents a motivated desire for negative feedback (Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull, & Pelham, 1992; Swann, Wenzlaff, & Tafarodi, 1992; but also see Alloy & Lipman, 1992; Hooley & Richters, 1992; Sacco & Phares, 2001). Future research should examine whether something other than LSE is leading depressed people to seek negative interaction partners.

Regulatory focus may be one such factor. Higgins (1997) has shown that some people have a conservative, self-protective approach to life, guided by concerns with safety and minimizing negative outcomes, whereas other people have a promotion focus, oriented toward growth and accomplishment. When it comes to situations involving evaluative feedback, our findings suggest that LSE people are more apt to be characterized by a prevention focus than a promotion focus.

Finally, our findings highlight the need to distinguish between global self-esteem and specific self-views. Although these constructs are positively correlated and are often treated synonymously, they are conceptually independent and have distinct correlates and origins (Brown et al., 2001; Brown & Marshall, 2001; Dutton & Brown, 1997). Specific self-views guide people's cognitive reactions to evaluative feedback (Dutton & Brown, 1997), global self-esteem guides people's emotional reactions to evaluative feedback (Brown & Dutton, 1995a; Brown & Marshall, 2001), and the two constructs interact to affect information-seeking behavior. This latter finding is particularly important because some researchers have questioned whether global self-esteem plays an important role in psychological life (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Gergen, 1971; Marsh, 1990). Our findings suggest that in situations involving self-evaluative feedback, any model of behavior should take both constructs into account.

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