

The role of self-esteem and agreeableness in self-reported capitalization outcomes

by

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A thesis

presented to the University of Waterloo

in fulfillment of the

thesis requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2015

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Abstract

Variation in self-esteem and agreeableness may determine who benefits most from capitalization. The present study investigated the role of self-esteem and agreeableness in capitalization processes in romantic relationships. Capitalization occurs when people share personal positive news with others, and it has well-established affective benefits. In the present study, however, I expected that people with lower self-esteem (LSEs) would not derive the same affective benefits from capitalizing as would their higher self-esteem peers (HSEs). Participants reported on the most recent positive event they had disclosed to their romantic partner, and their mood prior to and following disclosure. Relative to HSEs, LSEs reported disclosing less enthusiastically and openly, feeling greater concern about their partner's potential response, enjoying the interaction less, and perceiving overall worse responding from their partners. Despite these less positive self-reported expectations for, and perceptions of, the interaction, LSEs' self-reported mood improved following disclosure. Controlling for self-reported typical mood, LSEs' self-reported positive mood after capitalization did not differ from HSEs'. These findings suggest that LSEs benefit from sharing good news with romantic partners, despite having some reservations about the process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Joanne Wood for being the most supportive and encouraging supervisor I could imagine—it has truly been a privilege to work with her and to grow as a researcher under her guidance over the past two years. I would also like to thank my readers, Richard Eibach and Hilary Bergsieker, for taking the time to not only provide thoughtful and constructive feedback, but to teach me new things along the way. Last but not least, I want to thank Tom, whose patience, love, and kindness make me feel as though I could write a million theses.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Conventional wisdom tells us that the positive events we experience—be they landing our dream job, receiving a good grade, or buying a new home—lead to enduring changes in our happiness and life satisfaction. If I could just get that raise, life would be perfect! Empirical evidence, however, does not always bear this claim out. Although positive events lead to increases in positive well-being, their benefits tend to be short-lived, as we quickly adapt to new circumstances—both bad *and* good—a process termed hedonic adaptation (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). Our initial excitement and positive emotions wane, and we set our sights on the next good thing (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Evidence suggests, however, that well-being has less to do with whether good things happen to us than how we respond when they do. Specifically, savoring and appreciating good events can counteract hedonic adaptation and lead to relatively long-term increases in happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

Langston (1994) used the term *capitalization* to refer to the process of making the most of one's own good fortune by marking or celebrating the positive event in some way. Given the benefits of savoring and appreciating our good fortunes, it is not surprising that capitalization leads to changes in positive well-being. Specifically, Langston's research demonstrated that responding to personal good news in an expressive manner led to increased positive affect, over and above that derived from the event itself. Although the initial definition of capitalization included several kinds of expressive responses to positive events (e.g., jumping for joy, going out for dinner to celebrate, or telling another person), the term has since been adapted to refer primarily to the act of sharing news of one's good fortune with others, particularly with close

others (e.g., Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Smith & Reis, 2012). Though much emphasis has been placed on the importance of self-disclosing and seeking support in the bad times (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000; Harlow & Cantor, 1995; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996), a growing body of evidence suggests that there are parallel, if not greater, benefits of sharing positive news with others and seeking support in the *good* times (e.g., Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, & Strachman, 2012). The present research examines how two personality dimensions, self-esteem and agreeableness, shape these processes.

Interpersonal Implications of Capitalization

Capitalization is an inherently interpersonal phenomenon, and therefore has implications for relationships. A series of experiments demonstrated that sharing personal positive news with an enthusiastic other leads people to feel more trusting of, and close to, that person, and to behave in a more prosocial manner towards them (Reis et al., 2010). Likewise, when people capitalized with their romantic partner, they reported an increased willingness to sacrifice for their partner and greater felt closeness. People who played a fun game with another person or shared their good news with a reserved confederate did not experience these outcomes.

The implications of capitalization for *romantic* relationships are particularly consequential. When partners react favorably, capitalization is associated with greater relationship satisfaction and intimacy and fewer relationship conflicts (Gable et al., 2004). Responses to positive event disclosures more strongly predict perceived support and relationship quality, satisfaction, and stability over time than does support provided for negative events or stressors (Gable et al., 2006, 2012).

Affective Implications of Capitalization

Perhaps the most well-documented benefits of capitalization are those related to subjective well-being. Sharing good news with others leads to reliable increase in happiness, positive affect, and life satisfaction (e.g., Gable et al., 2004; Hicks & Diamond, 2008; Lambert et al., 2013; Langston, 1994). On days when people capitalize on their most positive event, they report greater positive affect and life satisfaction than on days when they do not capitalize, even after accounting for the importance of the event, the importance of their most negative event on that day, the total number of positive and negative events they experience that day, and their trait neuroticism and extraversion (Gable et al., 2004). Furthermore, the greater the number of others with whom people share their positive news, the greater their affective benefit.

In a series of laboratory experiments and daily diary studies, sharing personal positive news with a romantic partner or close friend was associated with increased happiness, positive affect, and life satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2013). Importantly, people who wrote about their positive event without telling another person, or who engaged in a neutral interaction with a partner (e.g., telling their partner about something they had learned in class), did not derive such benefits. Like those of Reis and colleagues (2010), these findings suggest that the very act of sharing personal positive news with another person, not simply re-living it or engaging in social interaction, drives the affective benefits of capitalization. Capitalization not only leads to increases in positive well-being, but also decreases in *negative* well-being. Specifically, on days when people share (versus do not share) positive news with a romantic partner, they report less anxiety, regardless of perceived partner responsiveness (Gable et al., 2012).

Self-Esteem and Capitalization Outcomes

That capitalization leads to salutary outcomes is not in question. At least some of these benefits, however, may depend on the self-esteem of the person sharing the news. Self-esteem refers to the extent to which one values and likes oneself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). In individualistic cultures, self-esteem is strongly associated with happiness, life satisfaction, and positive and negative affect: People with lower self-esteem (LSEs) report lower levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Diener, 1995; Furnham & Cheng, 2000; Hardin & Larsen, 2014), and higher levels of negative affect than those with high self-esteem (HSEs; Leary & Downs, 1995). Because of its association with subjective well-being, self-esteem may play a role in the affective outcomes of capitalization. In particular, LSEs may receive less of a positive mood boost than HSEs.

One potential reason that LSEs may benefit less from capitalizing is that they are relatively ambivalent about positive moods. When they feel sad, LSEs are less willing than HSEs to engage in activities that would improve their mood or cheer themselves up (Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, & Brown, 2002; Wood, Heimpel, Manwell, & Whittington, 2009). For example, when given the chance to watch a funny movie after undergoing a negative mood induction, LSEs expressed less desire to do so than did HSEs, despite acknowledging that it would in fact improve their mood (Heimpel et al., 2002). LSEs' unwillingness to improve a sad mood may arise in part from their tendency to feel less deserving of positive affect than their HSE peers, and to see negative moods as more typical of themselves (Heimpel et al., 2002; Wood, Heimpel, et al., 2009). Perhaps because of the relative atypicality of positive affect for LSEs, they also report less comfort with, and more dampening of, intense positive affect (Wood, Heimpel, &

Michela, 2003). LSEs may thus be less likely than HSEs to celebrate or draw attention to their good fortunes, because doing so could further heighten their positive affect.

LSEs may encounter a double disadvantage when it comes to reaping affective benefits from capitalization. Not only are they less comfortable with positive affect than HSEs are, LSEs are also less comfortable with personal successes (Wood et al., 2003; Wood, Heimpel, Newby-Clark, & Ross, 2005). After success, LSEs report feeling happy, but also anxious, and are more likely than HSEs to focus on negative aspects of the event (e.g., possibly letting someone down in the future). Similarly, whereas HSEs express more positive thoughts about themselves after success than after neutral events, the positivity of LSEs' self-relevant thoughts does not differ after success (Wood et al., 2005). LSEs may also experience psychological discomfort when they receive information that suggests they are valued socially (i.e., that they are liked by others; Stinson et al., 2010). Therefore, success events, whether academic (e.g., receiving a good grade), professional (e.g., being commended by one's boss), physical (e.g., reaching a fitness goal), or social (e.g., going on a good date), may make LSEs both happy *and* uncomfortable, rendering LSEs less likely to enjoy sharing their news with others.

A final reason that LSEs may benefit less from capitalization is their tendency to underestimate their partners' regard for them and misinterpret their partners' behaviors as rejecting (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001). LSEs may thus be wary of sharing good news with their partner or may downplay their excitement out of fear that their partner will not respond well.

To summarize, self-esteem may play a role in capitalization processes and specifically, in the affective benefits derived from it, for three primary reasons. Relative to HSEs, LSEs may (a)

be more hesitant to heighten their positive affect, (b) enjoy success events or receiving good fortune less, especially if they worry that the event sets up expectations for future successes, and (c) hesitate more to share good news with romantic partners due to concerns about their response.

To my knowledge, only one published study has examined the role of discloser self-esteem among romantic couples: On days following a conflict with a romantic partner, LSEs perceived lower partner enthusiasm in response to their capitalization attempts than they did on days following no conflict, whereas HSEs perceived more (Smith & Reis, 2012). These findings do not speak directly to the proposed outcomes of the present research, but they do suggest that the self-esteem of the person sharing the good news influences capitalization.

The Role of Agreeableness

Not only self-esteem, but also trait agreeableness, may influence capitalization processes. More agreeable people tend to be more kind, cooperative, generous, and trusting than those who are less agreeable (Goldberg, 1992). Moreover, higher agreeableness is associated with desire to maintain harmonious social relationships and with expectations that relationship partners will be warm, caring, and responsive (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Perunovic, 2008). Agreeableness is also related to experiencing higher levels of positive affect (Augustine & Larsen, 2015; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; McCrae & Costa, 1991), and specifically, to experiencing positive emotions linked to developing and maintaining close social relationships (e.g., love, compassion; Shiota, Keltner, & John, 2006). Agreeable people are also more skilled than less agreeable people at self-regulation, and particularly at regulating negative affect (Graziano & Habashi, 2010; Graziano & Tobin, 2009; Haas, Omura, Constable, & Canli, 2007; Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinary, 2000).

Though relatively understudied in relationship science, a growing body of literature suggests that agreeableness has important implications for romantic relationships. For instance, among married couples, self-reported agreeableness is negatively associated with hostility (e.g., shouting at one's partner) and low warmth (e.g., not being affectionate towards one's partner), and positively associated with marital and sexual satisfaction (Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004). Similarly, agreeableness is predictive of greater intimacy in romantic relationships (particularly among men; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004), and higher relationship quality, due to greater felt security (Perunovic, 2008). People whose relationship partners are more agreeable report higher life satisfaction (Furler, Gomez, & Grob, 2013), and in a speed-dating paradigm, people experienced more positive affect in the presence of more (versus less) agreeable partners (Berrios, Totterdell, & Niven, 2015). Agreeable people also report that they are better at providing emotional support than do less agreeable people (Jenkins-Guarnieri, Wright, & Hudiburgh, 2012). Perhaps one reason that agreeable people tend to make for better relationship partners and report greater relationship quality themselves is their tendency to be less quarrelsome and less likely to reciprocate a partner's quarrelsomeness (Moskowitz, 2010)—possibly due to their more skillful negative affect regulation.

I propose that agreeableness may moderate some of the effects of low discloser self-esteem on capitalization outcomes. Specifically, I expect that LSEs who are high in agreeableness will get the same affective benefits from capitalizing as will HSEs. The relevance of self-esteem to close relationships has been well-documented. Murray and her colleagues have shown that people with lower self-esteem doubt their partner's regard and behave in a more self-protective manner than HSEs—withdrawing from their partners when they feel their relationship is threatened (for reviews, see Cavallo, Murray, & Holmes, 2013; Wood & Forest, 2010). If self-

esteem is conceptualized of as one's view of the *self*, agreeableness can be conceptualized as one's view of *others*. In the context of capitalization, a benevolent view of others may shield against a negative view of the self. For example, a person with lower self-esteem may expect a less enthusiastic response from their partner, but if that person is high in agreeableness, their expectation that others will be caring and responsive may buffer against these negative expectations. Furthermore, because agreeableness is associated with experiencing more positive affect and the ability to regulate negative affect, it may protect against LSEs' tendencies to experience more negative and less positive affect (Forest & Wood, 2012; Heimpel et al., 2002; Wood, Heimpel, et al., 2009).

CHAPTER TWO

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF SELF-ESTEEM AND AGREEABLENESS IN CAPITALIZATION PROCESSES IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The present study investigated whether self-esteem and agreeableness were associated with capitalization processes in romantic relationships. Participants filled out measures of self-esteem, agreeableness, and typical mood before briefly describing the last time they told their partner about a personal positive event (e.g., receiving a promotion). Participants were then asked to recall their mood and affect immediately following the interaction. They also reported how enthusiastic and open they chose to be when disclosing, why they chose to disclose in the way that they did, how much they enjoyed the interaction, and how enthusiastically their partner responded. I predicted that, compared with their HSE peers, LSEs would report: (a) capitalizing less enthusiastically and openly than HSEs, (b) greater concern that their partners would not respond well, (c) enjoying the interaction less, (d) receiving less responsiveness from their partners, and (e) less affective benefit from capitalization (i.e., less of an increase in positive mood from typical to post-capitalization mood). I also expected that overall, LSEs would report a worse mood than HSEs (i.e., a worse typical mood, worse post-capitalization mood).

Similarly, I predicted that people who were more (versus less) agreeable would report: (a) enjoying the interaction more, (b) receiving more responsiveness from their partner, and (c) receiving more of an increase in positive mood following capitalization. I also predicted that agreeableness would correlate with more positive self-reported typical and post-capitalization moods. However, I was particularly interested in whether agreeableness would act as a buffer against lower self-esteem: I predicted that individuals who were lower in self-esteem, but higher in agreeableness, would get the same affective benefits as HSEs.

Method

Participants

Initially, 175 adults involved in romantic relationships completed the study through the Amazon.com Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website for \$1.50 USD. Analyses excluded 12 participants who failed to comply with instructions (e.g., by writing about an event that involved their romantic partner) or take the study seriously (e.g., by missing several attention-check items or selecting the same answer for every item on a scale), resulting in a final sample of 163 (85 women, 77 men, 1 unspecified). Participants were between the ages of 19 and 68 ($M = 34$, $SD = 10$; $Mdn = 32$) and had been in their relationship for between .08 and 45 years ($M = 6.74$, $SD = 7.18$; $Mdn = 5.00$). Forty-three percent of participants were married, 29% were exclusively dating, 21% were cohabiting, 3% casually dating, 3% were engaged, and <1% were in a common-law marriage.

Materials

Likert scales assessed all relevant constructs.

Self-esteem. Rosenberg's (1965) 10-item self-esteem scale ($\alpha = .92$) assessed global self-esteem with items such as "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). This reliable, well-validated measure is the most frequently used self-esteem scale (Gray-Little, Williams, & Hancock, 1997; Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

Agreeableness. The 9-item Agreeableness subscale from John, Donahue, and Kentle's (1991) Big Five Inventory (BFIA) assessed agreeableness ($\alpha = .86$) with items such as "I am someone who has a forgiving nature," rated from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). The

Big Five Inventory is widely used in social and personality psychology and demonstrates good convergent and discriminant validity (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998; Rammstedt & John, 2007).

Enthusiasm and openness of capitalization disclosure. Participants reported how open and enthusiastic they had been during their capitalization disclosure using a 10-item measure ($\alpha = .90$), including items from Gross and John (2003), MacGregor, Fitzsimons, and Holmes (2013), and novel items. Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include “I downplayed my enthusiasm” (reverse-scored) and “I expressed genuine excitement about my positive event.”

Motivations for capitalization approach. Next, participants were asked “Why did you choose to tell your partner about your positive event in the manner that you did?” and then rated items tapping three reasons for capitalizing in a particular way: (a) desire to connect with one’s partner (3 items; e.g., “I wanted my partner to celebrate with me”), (b) concerns about one’s partner’s response (2 items; e.g., “I didn’t think my partner would care that much”), and (c) modesty concerns (3 items; e.g., “I didn’t want to make my partner feel inferior”).¹ Items were rated from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*). Subscale reliabilities ranged from $\alpha = .64$ to $.78$.

Enjoyment of capitalization interaction. Enjoyment of the capitalization interaction was assessed with 8 items ($\alpha = .88$), such as “The interaction with my partner was pleasant” and “The interaction with my partner strengthened our relationship,” rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

¹ This measure was initially made up of ten items, but two items (“I always tell my partner everything” and “I wasn’t feeling very close to my partner at the time”) did not fit theoretically into one of the three factors and were therefore excluded from the main analyses. Analyses of each item indicated that agreeable people were more likely to endorse “I always tell my partner everything,” $b = 0.35$, $t(159) = 3.53$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.54], whereas LSEs were more likely to endorse “I wasn’t feeling very close to my partner at the time,” $b = -0.27$, $t(159) = -2.29$, $p = .023$, 95% CI [-0.51, -0.04].

Perceived responses to capitalization attempt. The 12-item Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts scale (PRCA; Gable et al., 2004) assessed perceived partner responses to the capitalization attempt. A modified question stem specifically targeted the event participants described (i.e., “We would like to ask you some questions about how your partner responded to the good thing that happened to you”), rather than partner responses to their good news in general. The PRCA has shown good discriminant and convergent validity (Gable et al., 2004, 2006), and measures four possible types of responding: (a) active-constructive (e.g., “My partner reacted to my good news enthusiastically”), (b) passive-constructive (e.g., “My partner tried not to make a big deal out of it, but was happy for me”), (c) active-destructive (e.g., “My partner found a problem with it”), and (d) passive-destructive (e.g., “My partner didn’t pay much attention to me”). Each type of responding was assessed using 3 items, rated from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Scale reliabilities for each subscale ranged from $\alpha = .72$ to $.94$.

Mood. Mood was assessed using the well-validated Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS; Mayer & Gaschke, 1988). The BMIS consists of 16 adjectives (e.g., *happy*, *grouchy*, *sad*), rated from 1 (*definitely do not feel*) to 4 (*definitely feel*). After reverse-scoring unpleasant mood adjectives, the 16 items were averaged to create an overall pleasant mood score. Typical mood ($\alpha = .89$) was assessed with instructions to select the response that indicates “how well each adjective describes your typical mood,” whereas post-capitalization mood ($\alpha = .77$) was assessed with reference to “how well each adjective describes your mood after you told your partner about the good thing that happened to you.”

Affect. The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) assessed affect. The PANAS demonstrates good validity (for a review, see Weiner, Schinka, & Velicer, 2003), and consists of 10 positive and 10 negative adjectives (e.g., *excited*,

nervous, proud), scored from 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*). Typical affect (positive affect $\alpha = .92$; negative affect $\alpha = .92$) was assessed by asking participants “to what extent you typically feel this way,” whereas post-capitalization affect (positive affect $\alpha = .92$; negative affect $\alpha = .88$) was assessed by asking “to what extent you felt this way after you told your partner about the good thing that happened to you.”

Procedure

Participants completed the survey online, through Qualtrics.com. After a short demographic questionnaire (age, sex, relationship length/status), participants completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, BFIA, BMIS (typical), and PANAS (typical). Next, participants were asked to think about the most recent personal positive event that they had told their romantic partner about, using an adapted version of Gable et al.’s (2006) capitalization interaction instructions:

The next part of this survey deals with how couples discuss the good things that happen to them. We are not interested in how couples discuss the positive things that happen to both of you, such as going on vacation, or something that the other has done for you. Instead, we are interested in how couples talk about the positive events that one member has in his or her life.

We would like you to think of the most recent positive event in your life that you told your partner about. Your positive event may be something that happened to you recently or in the past that continues to make you happy, or something going on now. Examples of positive events would be receiving a promotion at work, or a financial windfall; being offered a job, internship, or scholarship; becoming more physically fit; learning a new skill; or even receiving a compliment or gift

from someone other than your partner. Please pick an event that you told your partner about.

Please take a few moments now to think of your positive event.

When you have chosen your event, please enter a brief description of it in the space below.

Participants then filled out the BMIS and PANAS (post-capitalization versions), which assessed how they felt after the interaction. They then completed the scales assessing their enthusiasm and openness during the disclosure, reasons for disclosing in the manner that they did, enjoyment of the interaction, and the PRCA. Participants were then debriefed.

Results

Self-esteem ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .63$) and agreeableness ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .74$) were mean-centered for analysis. Univariate outliers were trimmed (Winsorized) to within ± 3.29 SD s of their mean (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Lacking reason to think that these extreme scores reflected errors, Winsorizing and retaining univariate outliers rather than dropping them is a conservative approach that avoids giving them undue leverage. For full descriptive statistics, see Table 1.

Event Descriptives

Two coders, blind to participant self-esteem and agreeableness, coded each event that participants reported into 1 of 10 possible categories: school, work, social life, financial, fitness/health, leisure/vacation, being kind to others, activities/hobbies, receiving a gift, and other ($\kappa = .85$). The majority of events fell into 4 categories: work (39%), financial (17%), fitness/health (13%), or school (9%). A multinomial logistic regression revealed no significant

self-esteem or agreeableness differences in the types of events people chose to list, model $\chi^2(18, N = 163) = 22.24, p = .222$.

Events were also coded as controllable or uncontrollable ($\kappa = .75$). Controllable events are the result of skill, ability, effort, or a personal attribute of the individual (e.g., reaching a fitness goal), whereas uncontrollable events arise from luck or chance (e.g., winning a draw). Most people described a controllable event, rather than an uncontrollable event (85% vs. 15%). A binomial logistic regression revealed no significant self-esteem and agreeableness differences in event controllability, model $\chi^2(2, N = 163) = 2.44, p = .295$.

The objective importance of each event was rated from 1 (*most people would say this event is not at all a big deal*) to 7 (*most people would say this event is an extremely big deal*). The two coders' ratings showed good agreement ($r = .73$) and were averaged into an objective importance composite. The combination of self-esteem, agreeableness, and their interaction marginally predicted objective event importance, $F(3, 159) = 2.51, p = .061$, explaining 3% of its variance. Agreeableness, $b = 0.42, t(159) = 2.72, p = .007, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.12, 0.72]$, but not self-esteem, $b = -0.16, t(159) < 1, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.53, 0.20]$, was associated with event importance. People who were more agreeable reported capitalizing on events that were more objectively important than those who were less agreeable. The interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness was not significant, $b = -0.07, t(159) < 1, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.49, 0.34]$.

In summary, participants most commonly capitalized on work, financial, fitness/health, and school events, and these events were more often under people's control than not. Self-esteem and agreeableness were unrelated to event type and controllability, but agreeable people listed objectively more important events than did less agreeable people.

Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

Bivariate correlations are found in Table 2. Self-esteem and agreeableness were moderately correlated, $r = .39, p < .001$. Elsewhere in the literature, the zero-order association between self-esteem and agreeableness ranges from uncorrelated to correlations in the high .30s, depending on the characteristics of the measures and sample, and whether global self-esteem or specific types of self-esteem (e.g., academic) are examined (Hair & Graziano, 2003; Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001; Robins et al., 2001; Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Strelan, 2007).

Several other notable associations among study variables emerged (all $ps < .001$ and $df = 161$, except as noted). For instance, self-reported enthusiasm and openness during disclosure was positively associated with reported enjoyment of the interaction, $r = .61$, a more positive overall perceived partner response, $r = .65$, and a better post-capitalization mood: pleasant mood, $r = .50$, positive affect, $r = .48$, and negative affect, $r = -.28$. Similarly, enjoyment of the interaction was related to a better overall perceived partner response, $r = .74$, and a better post-capitalization mood: pleasant mood, $r = .55$, positive affect, $r = .50$, and negative affect, $r = -.28$. Perceiving a more positive response from one's partner during capitalization was also associated with a better mood after capitalizing: pleasant mood, $r = .46$, positive affect, $r = .45$, and negative affect, $r = -.35$. Disclosing in a particular way due to concerns about a partner not responding well were positively associated with modesty, $r = .30$, and negatively associated with a motivation to connect with one's partner, $r = -.24, p = .002$. The objective importance of events significantly correlated only with people's self-reported typical level of negative affect, $r = -.16, p = .044$.

Capitalization Processes

First, I examined the role of self-esteem and agreeableness in processes associated with the capitalization interaction itself (i.e., self-reported enthusiasm and openness during disclosure, reasons for being more or less enthusiastic and open, enjoyment of the interaction, perceived partner responsiveness). Multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the associations among self-esteem and agreeableness, and each dependent variable.

Enthusiasm and openness of capitalization disclosure. I predicted that LSEs would report capitalizing less openly and enthusiastically than HSEs. The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness explained 9% of the variance in enthusiasm and openness during disclosure, $F(3, 159) = 6.17, p = .001$. As shown in Table 3, self-esteem was positively associated with enthusiasm and openness of disclosure, $t(159) = 3.53, p = .001$. Relative to HSEs, LSEs reported being less enthusiastic and open with their partners during capitalization. Agreeableness did not explain significant variance in enthusiasm and openness, $t(159) < 1$, and the interaction of self-esteem and agreeableness was not significant, $t(159) = 1.27, p = .207$.

Motivations for capitalization approach. After answering questions about the enthusiasm and openness of their disclosure, participants were asked why they chose to capitalize in the manner that they did (e.g., more or less enthusiastically and openly). My primary prediction was that relative to HSEs, LSEs would report capitalization approaches shaped by greater concern that their partners would not respond well.

Self-esteem and agreeableness explained 5% of the variance in participants' reports that they disclosed in a manner motivated by desires to connect with their partner, $F(3, 159) = 4.06, p = .008$. People higher in agreeableness were more likely to say that they disclosed in a certain way in order to connect with their partner, $t(159) = 2.51, p = .013$. Self-esteem was unrelated to

motivations to connect, $t(159) = 1.25, p = .212$, and did not significantly interact with agreeableness, $t(159) < 1$.

The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness explained 2% of the variance in motivations to disclose in a particular way due to concerns about a partner's response, $F(3, 159) = 1.95, p = .123$. Although the overall model was not significant, self-esteem was associated with concerns about a partner's response, $t(159) = -2.11, p = .036$, as predicted. Compared with HSEs, LSEs expressed greater concern that their partners might not respond well when capitalizing. Agreeableness was not associated with these concerns, $t(160) < 1$, and did not interact with self-esteem, $t(159) < 1$.

The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness was unrelated to disclosing in a particular way due to modesty concerns, $F(3, 159) = 1.15, p = .332$. Neither self-esteem nor agreeableness were significantly associated with modesty, $ps > .124$.

Enjoyment of capitalization interaction. I predicted that LSEs would report enjoying the capitalization interaction with their partner less than HSEs and that agreeable people would report enjoying the interaction to a greater degree than less agreeable people. Overall, the combination of self-esteem and agreeableness explained 7% of the variance in participants' reported enjoyment of the capitalization interaction, $F(3, 157) = 5.03, p = .002$.² Self-esteem was marginally associated with enjoyment of the interaction, $t(157) = 1.70, p = .091$, indicating that LSEs were slightly less likely than HSEs to say that they found the interaction with their partner to be pleasant and enjoyable. Agreeableness was also associated with enjoyment, $t(157) = 2.40, p = .017$. As predicted, people who were higher in agreeableness were more likely to report that

² Degrees of freedom differ in some analyses due to the exclusion of multivariate outlier(s) based on a Mahalanobis distance criterion of $\chi^2(3) = 16.27, p < .001$, or $\chi^2(4) = 18.47, p < .001$, depending on analysis.

they found the interaction with their partner positive and enjoyable. The interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness was not significant, $t(157) < 1$.

Perceived responses to capitalization attempt. An overall response score was calculated by subtracting scores for passive-constructive, active-destructive, and passive-destructive responding from those for active-constructive responding (Gable et al., 2004; Smith & Reis, 2012), with higher scores indicating more positive, enthusiastic responding. In general, I predicted that LSEs would perceive less positive, enthusiastic responding from their partners than HSEs, whereas highly agreeable people would perceive more positive, enthusiastic responding than those who were less agreeable. The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness accounted for 8% of the variance in overall perceived positive responses to capitalization attempts, $F(3, 157) = 5.47, p = .001$. Self-esteem uniquely predicted overall perceived positive responding, $t(157) = 2.46, p = .015$. Overall, compared to their HSE peers, LSEs perceived less positive and enthusiastic responding from their partners. Examination of each of the four types of responding revealed that LSEs and HSEs perceived the same amount of active-constructive responding from their partners, $b = 0.20, t(159) = 1.14, p = .256, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.15, 0.56]$, but relative to HSEs, LSEs perceived more passive-constructive, $b = -0.46, t(159) = -2.29, p = .023, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.85, -0.06]$, active-destructive, $b = -0.40, t(159) = -2.82, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.68, -0.12]$, and passive-destructive responding, $b = -0.35, t(157) = -2.53, p = .013, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.63, -0.08]$.

Agreeableness was unrelated to overall perceived responses to capitalization, $t(157) = 1.59, p = .115$. People who were higher in agreeableness, however, perceived more active-constructive responding than those who were lower in agreeableness, $b = 0.42, t(159) = 2.82, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.13, 0.71]$. The interaction of self-esteem and agreeableness was not associated

with perceived responses to capitalization attempts, either overall, or on any of the individual response types, all $ps > .219$.

To summarize, compared with HSEs, people with lower self-esteem reported being less enthusiastic and open during their disclosures, were more likely to say that they disclosed in a particular way due to concerns that their partner would not respond well, and reported enjoying the interaction marginally less. Overall, LSEs perceived worse responding from their partners than did HSEs, due to LSEs perceiving more passive and destructive forms of responding than HSEs, but not less active-constructive responding.

Even though agreeableness did not correlate with reported enthusiasm and openness during disclosure, highly agreeable people were more likely to say that they had disclosed in a particular way to connect with their partner, to report enjoying the interaction more, and to have perceived more active-constructive responding than less agreeable people.

Mood and Affect

First, I examined associations between self-esteem and agreeableness, and both typical and post-capitalization mood and affect. I then examined whether, controlling for typical mood and affect, self-esteem and agreeableness were associated with differences in post-capitalization mood and affect. Last, I investigated whether there were self-esteem and agreeableness differences in the extent of self-reported changes in mood.

Typical mood and affect. The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness explained 56% of the variance in typical pleasant mood, $F(3, 158) = 67.94, p < .001$ (see Table 4 for full model statistics). Consistent with predictions, both self-esteem, $t(158) = 8.78, p < .001$, and agreeableness, $t(158) = 6.36, p < .001$, were associated with typical pleasant mood, with LSEs

and those lower in agreeableness reporting a less pleasant mood, in general. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not significantly interact, $t(158) < 1$.

Similarly, the combination of self-esteem and agreeableness accounted for 26% of the variance in people's reported typical positive affect, $F(3, 159) = 20.49, p < .001$. Self-esteem, $t(159) = 5.27, p < .001$, and agreeableness, $t(159) = 3.26, p = .001$, were both positively associated with typical positive affect: LSEs and less agreeable people reported experiencing less typical positive affect. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not significantly interact, $t(159) < 1$.

Self-esteem, agreeableness, and their interaction explained 24% of the variance in typical negative affect, $F(3, 159) = 18.48, p < .001$. Self-esteem, $t(159) = -3.86, p < .001$, and agreeableness, $t(159) = -3.55, p = .001$, were both negatively associated with typical negative affect. On average, LSEs and people lower in agreeableness reported greater typical negative affect.

These main effects were qualified by a marginal interaction of self-esteem and agreeableness, $t(159) = 1.92, p = .057$, consistent with the prediction that agreeableness would moderate the effects of self-esteem. Simple slopes analyses revealed that LSEs who were also low in agreeableness reported experiencing particularly high levels of typical negative affect, compared with HSEs who were low in agreeableness, $b = -0.41, t(159) = -4.81, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.58, -0.24]$, and LSEs who were high in agreeableness, $b = -0.33, t(159) = -3.85, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.50, -0.16]$. LSEs who were high in agreeableness reported experiencing the same level of typical negative affect as HSEs who were high in agreeableness, $b = -0.17, t(159) = -1.55, p = .123, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.39, 0.05]$, and HSEs who were low in agreeableness reported experiencing the same amount of typical negative affect as HSEs who were high in agreeableness, $b = -0.12, t(159) = -1.48, p = .142, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.28, 0.04]$.

Post-capitalization mood and affect. The results reported in the following section closely mirror the zero-order correlations found in Table 2. In line with my predictions, self-esteem and agreeableness explained 22% of the variance in post capitalization pleasant mood, $F(3, 159) = 16.55, p < .001$. Both self-esteem, $t(159) = 2.93, p = .004$, and agreeableness, $t(159) = 4.74, p < .001$, uniquely contributed to post-capitalization pleasant mood. LSEs and those who were lower in agreeableness reported a less pleasant mood than HSEs or those who were higher in agreeableness. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not interact, $t(159) < 1$.

Self-esteem and agreeableness explained 14% of the variance in post-capitalization positive affect, $F(3, 159) = 9.97, p < .001$. Self-esteem, $t(159) = 3.38, p = .001$, and agreeableness, $t(159) = 2.64, p = .009$, were both positively associated with post-capitalization positive affect. LSEs and people lower in agreeableness reported experiencing less positive affect after capitalizing than did HSEs and those who were higher in agreeableness. The interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness was not significant, $t(159) < 1$.

The combination of self-esteem and agreeableness explained 3% of the variance in post-capitalization negative affect, $F(3, 159) = 2.45, p = .065$. Self-esteem, $t(159) = -2.18, p = .031$, but not agreeableness, $t(159) < 1$, was negatively associated with post-capitalization negative affect. LSEs reported experiencing greater negative affect, post-capitalization, than HSEs. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not significantly interact, $t(159) < 1$.

Change in mood and affect relative to typical mood and affect. I next examined whether self-esteem and agreeableness were associated with post-capitalization differences in mood and affect, once accounting for typical mood and affect. The post-capitalization mood and affect variables were used as the outcomes, and each typical mood and affect variable was included as a covariate in Step 1 of its corresponding regression analysis. In Step 2, mean-

centered self-esteem, agreeableness, and the self-esteem by agreeableness interaction were entered. I expected that self-esteem, in particular, would be associated with differences in self-reported post-capitalization mood, such that HSEs would report a more positive mood than LSEs.

Contrary to predictions, however, controlling for typical pleasant mood, self-esteem and agreeableness were not associated with post-capitalization differences in pleasant mood, $\Delta F(3, 156) = 1.56, p = .200$. Similarly, after accounting for typical positive affect, self-esteem and agreeableness did were not associated with post-capitalization differences in positive affect, $\Delta F(3, 158) < 1$.

Controlling for typical negative affect, the combination of self-esteem and agreeableness was associated with differences in post-capitalization negative affect, $\Delta F(3, 156) = 2.92, p = .036$, explaining an additional 2% of variance.³ This effect was driven primarily by the interaction of self-esteem and agreeableness, $b = -0.09, t(156) = -2.38, p = .018, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.17, -0.02]$. Simple slopes analyses indicated that, controlling for self-reported typical negative affect, those who were low in both self-esteem and agreeableness reported less negative affect following capitalization than did those who were low in self-esteem but high in agreeableness, $b = 0.11, t(156) = 2.69, p = .008, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.03, 0.18]$. Controlling for self-reported typical negative affect, those who were high in both self-esteem and agreeableness reported marginally less negative affect than those who were low in self-esteem but high in agreeableness, $b = 0.07, t(156) = 1.77, p = .079, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.01, 0.15]$. All other simple slopes were nonsignificant ($ps > .197$).

³ Moderation analyses revealed a significant self-esteem by agreeableness by typical negative affect interaction, $b = -0.13, t(153) = -2.51, p = .013, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.23, -0.03]$. Among those who reported higher levels of typical negative affect, LSEs who were more agreeable tended to report higher post-capitalization negative affect than LSEs who were less agreeable, $b = 0.10, t(153) = 2.22, p = .028, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.01, 0.19]$.

Change in mood and affect within high and low self-esteem and agreeableness. Last, I examined whether self-reported mood improved significantly after capitalization, and if so, for whom. Change scores were created by subtracting each typical mood and affect variable from its corresponding post-capitalization variable. These new scores were used as the outcome variables. The values reported below pertain to the intercept of each regression model (i.e., the effect of capitalization). A positive coefficient represents an increase on that particular mood or affect measure from typical to post-capitalization. For analyses examining self-reported mood improvement within high and low self-esteem and agreeableness, self-esteem and agreeableness were re-centered at ± 1 *SD* from their means. I expected that HSEs and people higher in agreeableness would report a significant increase in positive mood and affect from their typical mood to post-capitalization mood, whereas LSEs and those lower in agreeableness would not.

Overall, self-reported pleasant mood, $b = 0.42$, $t(158) = 14.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.36, 0.48], increased from typical to post-capitalization. This pattern was evident even for those who were 1 *SD* below the mean of either self-esteem or agreeableness ($ps < .001$), and those who were 1 *SD* below the mean of *both* self-esteem and agreeableness, $b = 0.71$, $t(158) = 16.22$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.62, 0.79]. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not interact with capitalization, $b = 0.02$, $t(158) < 1$, 95% CI [-0.08, 0.13].

Similarly, overall, self-reported positive affect increased from typical to post-capitalization, $b = 0.52$, $t(159) = 8.63$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.40, 0.64]. Again, this pattern was present for those who were 1 *SD* below the mean of either self-esteem or agreeableness ($ps < .001$), and those who were 1 *SD* below the mean of *both* self-esteem and agreeableness, $b = 0.63$, $t(159) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.45, 0.81]. Self-esteem and agreeableness did not interact with capitalization, $b = 0.01$, $t(159) < 1$, 95% CI [-0.24, 0.22].

Self-reported negative affect decreased overall, $b = -0.30$, $t(157) = -8.92$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.36, -0.23]. This main effect of capitalization, however, was qualified by a significant interaction with self-esteem and agreeableness, $b = -0.15$, $t(157) = -2.36$, $p = .020$, 95% CI [-0.28, -0.02]. Follow-up analyses revealed that LSEs who were low in agreeableness, $b = -0.66$, $t(157) = -13.18$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.76, -0.56], LSEs who were high in agreeableness, $b = -0.16$, $t(157) = -1.98$, $p = .049$, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.00], and HSEs who were low in agreeableness, $b = -0.29$, $t(157) = -4.06$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.43, -0.15], reported a significant decrease in negative affect from typical to post-capitalization.

In summary, overall, LSEs reported being in a worse mood than HSEs, both typically and after capitalizing with their partner. However, both LSEs and HSEs reported mood improved after capitalizing, and controlling for typical pleasant mood and positive affect, LSEs' and HSEs' reported moods did not differ post-capitalization. The overall pattern of results was the same for agreeableness.

Agreeableness did not moderate the influence of self-esteem on post-capitalization mood and affect to the extent that I expected. It did, however, moderate the association between self-esteem and one of three affect measures—namely, self-reported typical negative affect: LSEs who were less agreeable reported higher levels of typical negative affect than LSEs who were more agreeable or HSEs who were less agreeable. Controlling for typical negative affect, LSEs who were less agreeable reported lower negative affect after capitalizing than did LSEs who were more agreeable.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION

It is well-established that capitalization leads to increases in well-being. I expected, however, that for people with lower self-esteem, such benefits may be elusive. In the present study, I examined self-esteem and agreeableness differences in the affective outcomes of capitalization. I asked people to recall the last time they had capitalized with their romantic partner, including how enthusiastically and openly they had disclosed, why they chose to disclose in the way that they did, how much they enjoyed the capitalization interaction, how well their partner responded, and how they felt after disclosing.

Self-esteem was associated with several aspects of capitalization. Whereas self-esteem was not associated with *what* people reported capitalizing on, it was associated with *how* people said they capitalized. Specifically, compared with their HSE counterparts, LSEs reported capitalizing less enthusiastically and openly, and were more likely to report doing so due to concerns about how their partner might respond. These results were expected, given that LSEs tend to underestimate their partner's regard for them (Murray et al., 2000, 2001, 2003). For LSEs, downplaying their positive event or tempering their excitement may also be self-protective—doing so could make it easier for LSEs to attribute a *partner's* less enthusiastic response (what LSEs expect to receive) to their own lower-key disclosure, rather than to their partner's low regard for them. If LSEs appear less excited themselves, they may have less of an expectation that their partners will respond excitedly. However, it is also possible that LSEs disclosed less enthusiastically and openly for reasons I did not examine. Though I did not make any predictions regarding agreeableness and disclosing in a particular way, the finding that agreeableness was associated with a motivation to connect with one's partner when capitalizing

aligns with the existing agreeableness literature (e.g., Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Perunovic, 2008; Shiota et al., 2006).

Self-esteem also appeared to play a role in perceived partner responsiveness. Although there were no self-esteem differences in perceptions of active-constructive responding, LSEs reported receiving more of the “bad” kinds of responding—passive-constructive, active-destructive, and passive-destructive responding—from their partners than did HSEs. These findings are consistent with LSEs’ tendency to interpret their romantic partner’s behaviors as being less caring and responsive than they actually are (Murray et al., 2003; Murray et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2001). Because I was unable to capture partners’ actual responses to capitalization, I do not know how accurate people’s perceptions of their partner’s responses were. It is possible that the partners of LSEs are just as responsive as those of HSEs, but LSEs simply perceive worse responding than do HSEs. It is also possible, however, that the partners of LSEs actually are less responsive, for example, if LSEs’ less enthusiastic disclosures elicit less partner enthusiasm. Alternatively, the tendency for LSEs to perceive less partner responsiveness may be a combination of bias (i.e., LSEs may perceive less enthusiastic responding than they actually receive) and reality (i.e., the partners of LSEs respond less enthusiastically than do the partners of HSEs). Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) reviewed research suggesting that in close relationships, perceptions of support and responsiveness are more likely affected by a combination of both bias *and* reality, than bias or reality alone. For example, women who are less certain of their partners’ regard for them underestimate their partner’s regard, which suggests bias, but are more sensitive to changes in that partner’s regard than are secure women, which suggests that insecure women are attuned to reality (Overall, Fletcher, & Kenny, 2012).

Despite my prediction, LSEs enjoyed capitalizing with their partners only marginally less than did HSEs. People who were highly agreeable, however, enjoyed capitalizing more than those who were less agreeable. This result is consistent with past research showing that agreeable people are motivated to connect with others and derive positive affect from doing so (e.g., Perunovic, 2008; Shiota et al., 2006). Similarly, consistent with agreeables' tendency to expect their partners to be responsive, highly agreeable people in the present study perceived more active-constructive responding from their partners than did less agreeable people.

Affective Outcomes of Capitalizing

Of primary interest to the present study was whether LSEs would get the same affective benefits from capitalizing as HSEs. As expected, LSEs reported a worse typical mood (i.e., a less pleasant mood, lower positive affect) and a worse post-capitalization mood than HSEs. I also predicted, however, that LSEs would get less of a positive mood boost from capitalizing. This prediction was not supported: Both LSEs and HSEs reported receiving a positive mood boost, and controlling for typical mood, LSEs' and HSEs' reported level of post-capitalization positive mood did not differ.

Even though LSEs perceived more passive and destructive forms of responding from their relationship partners than HSEs, they still reported that their mood improved after capitalization. There is reason to believe that LSEs may actually benefit more from a reserved response than an enthusiastic one. Although active constructive responding is thought to lead to the greatest inter- and intrapersonal benefits (Gable et al., 2004, 2006, 2012; Lambert et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2010), research suggests that the implications of a given response may depend on features of the relationship (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). The self-esteem of the disclosing partner may be one such feature.

There are two reasons I suspect that LSEs may prefer a reserved response. First, LSEs tend not to embrace personal positive events in the same way HSEs do. For example, after success, LSEs report feeling both happy and anxious, and are also more likely to dampen their positive feelings than HSEs (Wood et al., 2003; 2005). Similarly, when LSEs focus on both positive *and* negative self-statements, they feel happier than when they just focus on positive self-statements (Wood, Perunovic, et al., 2009). Thus, an enthusiastic, active constructive response from a romantic partner—one that encourages intense positive affect—may backfire and lead to increased anxiety and a worse mood among LSEs. Conversely, a muted yet positive response may allow LSEs to celebrate their good fortunes while enjoying a level of positive affect they feel comfortable with.

Second, feeling close to one's partner depends on feeling that one is understood and validated (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Similarly, *self-verification theory* suggests that people prefer to receive information that is consistent with their pre-existing self-concept (Swann, 1997). This is not to say that LSEs wish to have their negative self-views verified by their romantic partners (Murray et al., 2000). Instead, evidence suggests that LSEs desire to have their *feelings* validated (e.g., Marigold, Cavallo, Holmes, & Wood, 2014). LSEs may be happiest if they feel both positively regarded *and* validated—when their partners respond to their good news in a way that both acknowledges their good fortunes and demonstrates an understanding of their anxieties surrounding personal positive events. I intend to examine this possibility in future research.

Although LSEs may have some anxieties surrounding both experiencing and sharing good news, their desire to feel close to their partner may override these concerns. While they tend to be more self-protective than HSEs, LSEs do desire closeness, but find it difficult to

maintain (Murray et al., 2000). LSEs may thus see capitalization as a way to feel closer to their partners, not a way to improve their mood. LSEs report being less likely to do things to improve their negative moods (Heimpel et al., 2002; Wood et al., 2009)—capitalization may simply have the unintended consequence of improving LSEs' mood. Future research should more thoroughly examine LSEs' and HSEs' motivations for capitalizing.

Moderation by Agreeableness

Although I predicted that agreeableness would moderate some of the effects of having low self-esteem, this hypothesis was not well supported. Although agreeableness did moderate self-esteem's association with reported typical negative affect—those low in self-esteem but high in agreeableness reported a level of typical negative affect comparable to that of HSEs—agreeableness did not moderate self-esteem's association with post-capitalization negative affect.

People who are highly agreeable tend to be better at regulating their negative affect than people who are less agreeable (Graziano & Habashi, 2010; Haas et al., 2007; Ode & Robinson, 2009; Tobin et al., 2000). Though agreeableness is associated with a desire for positive, pleasant moods (Augustine, Hemenover, Larsen, & Shulman, 2010), the association between agreeableness and positive affect *regulation* remains relatively unexplored. Perhaps agreeableness plays less of a role in positive affect regulation than it does negative affect regulation, which may be why agreeableness did not moderate self-esteem differences in positive affect and pleasant mood in the present research. Such an interpretation is in line with Wood et al. (2003), who found that the predictors of positive and negative affect regulation differed somewhat: Neuroticism was more strongly associated with negative affect regulation than positive, whereas extraversion was more strongly associated with positive affect regulation than negative.

Limitations

The present research has a number of limitations that merit consideration. First, I relied on retrospective self-reports, and people may inaccurately recall their capitalization interaction and moods. Prior research suggests that HSEs and LSEs tend to be differentially biased when recalling past events and affective states. Using a recall timeframe similar to that reported by the majority of participants in the present study (less than one month), Christensen, Wood, and Feldman Barrett (2003) found that HSEs recalled past pleasant events as being more pleasant than they felt they were in the moment, whereas LSEs recalled past pleasant events as being less pleasant than they initially reported. Similarly, HSEs tended to recall experiencing more positive affect in response to positive events than they actually did, whereas LSEs recalled experiencing less. In the present study, LSEs may have recalled experiencing fewer or less intense positive emotions following capitalization than they experienced at the time, and fewer or less intense positive emotions than HSEs reported experiencing. Such a recall bias would likely have resulted in attenuated estimates of post-capitalization positive mood, and therefore, a smaller change from typical to post-capitalization positive mood for LSEs. Despite this potential attenuation, LSEs in the present study reported a significant increase in positive affect and pleasant mood. If anything, LSEs may have received an even greater affective benefit from capitalization than they reported experiencing.

Similarly, Schwarz's (2012) *feelings-as-information theory* posits that people sometimes use their present feelings to inform estimates of past feelings. In other words, in the present research, estimates of past and typical moods could have been affected by participants' mood at the time of the study. Because lower self-esteem is associated with a more negative mood in general, LSEs' estimates of their typical and post-capitalization mood may have been negatively

biased. However, if participants' recall in the present research was affected by their current mood, this influence would likely have affected their estimates of both typical and post-capitalization mood equally.

A second limitation of the present research is that I did not assess partner self-esteem and agreeableness. It is possible that people capitalize differently depending not only on their own self-esteem and agreeableness, but also on their partner's. For example, people tend to capitalize less positively and enthusiastically with LSE friends and romantic partners (MacGregor & Holmes, 2011; MacGregor, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2013). However, because relationship partners' self-esteem tends to be uncorrelated (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a), partner self-esteem should not have systematically influenced the results of the present study.

A third limitation is that I did not ask participants how important or desirable they felt their positive event was. Although I found no self-esteem differences in objective ratings of the events, objective ratings do not provide information regarding how people felt about these events themselves. It is possible, for example, that LSEs would find the same objectively positive event to be less pleasant than would HSEs. If this was the case, it could help explain why, for example, LSEs reported being less enthusiastic in their disclosures. Although differences in subjective perceptions of events likely played a role in the capitalization processes investigated here, they likely do not account for all the observed differences. Wood et al. (2003) found that self-esteem was associated with perceived desirability of personal positive events, but controlling for perceived desirability did not remove self-esteem differences in self-reported dampening of positive affect following these events. Furthermore, if LSEs had enjoyed their positive events less than HSEs, it would have likely reduced the affective benefit they experienced.

Last, the present findings should be considered in the context of the sample employed. This study was conducted among participants from MTurk, which may limit its generalizability. Evidence suggests that MTurk workers tend to be younger, more educated, less religious, more liberal, and less racially diverse than the general population (for a review, see Paolacci & Chandler, 2014). Research also suggests, however, that MTurk participants are more similar to community samples than are university student convenience samples. For example, the age, gender, income, and education of MTurk workers (vs. students) more closely matches that of the U.S. general population (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Of particular relevance to the present research, MTurk participants are more similar to community samples in their self-esteem and agreeableness than they are to student samples (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). That said, the results of the present study should be considered in light of these limitations, and future research should attempt to replicate these findings in more representative samples.

Current and Future Directions

Currently, I am conducting a dyadic laboratory study to examine real-time capitalization interactions between romantic couples. I am looking at how both partners' self-esteem and agreeableness play a role in these processes. This paradigm will allow me to investigate, for example, how positive and enthusiastic both partners are during capitalization. I am especially interested in how people respond to the capitalization attempts of LSE partners. For instance, are the partners of LSEs really less responsive than partners of HSEs? If so, is it perhaps because LSEs appear to rain on their own parades when they capitalize? I will also examine affective outcomes. For example, do people who disclose to LSE partners feel better or worse afterwards than people who disclose to HSE partners?

I am also running a second laboratory study looking at what happens to capitalization attempts when things are going well in relationships, compared with when things are going poorly. Prior research has demonstrated self-esteem differences in perceived responsiveness when people capitalize with their partners following a relationship threat (Smith and Reis, 2012). I am building on this work by examining how positive and negative relationship events affect disclosure *behavior*. Specifically, I am looking at the effect that recalling relationship threats (e.g., an argument with a partner) and relationship affirmations (e.g., a fun date) have on capitalization behaviors and on the likelihood of capitalization.

Conclusion

My findings suggest that, despite a number of factors working against them, LSEs report experiencing a boost in positive emotion after capitalizing with a romantic partner—just like their happier HSE peers. Capitalization has important implications for positive well-being, relationship quality and stability, and potentially, for relationship repair (Gable et al., 2004, 2006, 2012; Smith & Reis, 2012). People with lower self-esteem are less likely to experience satisfying and happy relationships and experience more negative moods than do HSEs (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b; Robinson & Cameron, 2012; Wood, Heimpel, et al., 2009). Understanding how capitalization can be of value to LSEs (e.g., as a way of connecting with their partners or feeling good about themselves and their relationships) is an important area of study. Recent research has called for interventions designed to improve LSEs' capitalization experiences (e.g., Smith & Reis, 2012)—the present research represents a first step in that direction by demonstrating that LSEs may indeed benefit from capitalizing to the same degree that HSEs do.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Skewness	Kurtosis
RSES	3.33(0.63)	-1.03	0.47
BFIA	3.78(0.74)	-0.43	-0.09
Enthusiasm	4.31(0.68)	-0.88	-0.23
Connection	4.08(0.82)	-0.77	-0.13
Concerns	1.56(0.87)	1.34	0.48
Modesty	2.15(1.11)	0.59	-0.76
Enjoyment	4.54(0.48)	-1.56	2.22
PRCA Total	-0.66(3.83)	-0.88	-0.33
BMIS Typical	3.10(0.50)	-0.56	0.13
BMIS Post	3.52(0.32)	-0.83	0.95
PA Typical	3.30(0.85)	-0.02	-0.55
PA Post	3.82(0.89)	-0.61	-0.26
NA Typical	1.51(0.62)	1.54	1.71
NA Post	1.16(0.30)	2.18	3.79

Note. RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; BFIA = Big Five Inventory – Agreeableness; Enthusiasm = enthusiasm and openness of capitalization disclosure; Connection = capitalizing in a particular way to connect with one’s partner; Concerns = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about a partner’s response; Modesty = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about making a partner feel jealous; Enjoyment = enjoyment of capitalization interaction; PRCA Total = overall perceived positive responding on the Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts Scale; BMIS Typical = typical pleasant mood; BMIS Post = post-capitalization pleasant mood; PA Typical = typical positive affect; PA Post = post-capitalization positive affect; NA Typical = typical negative affect; NA Post = post-capitalization negative affect.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. RSES	—												
2. BFIA	.39***	—											
3. Enthusiasm	.30***	.18*	—										
4. Connection	.18*	.25**	.45**	—									
5. Concerns	-.19*	-.08	-.55***	-.24**	—								
6. Modesty	-.02	.10	-.26***	.04	.30***	—							
7. Enjoyment	.23**	.26***	.61***	.61***	-.50***	-.08	—						
8. PRCA Total	.29***	.22**	.65***	.47***	-.62***	-.18*	.74***	—					
9. BMIS Typical	.64***	.59***	.26**	.29***	-.20**	.08	.38***	.30***	—				
10. BMIS Post	.36***	.44***	.50***	.38***	-.29***	-.01	.55***	.46***	.54***	—			
11. PA Typical	.48***	.39***	.14 [†]	.31***	-.11	.27***	.31***	.25**	.63***	.38***	—		
12. PA Post	.34***	.31***	.48***	.47***	-.27***	.07	.50***	.45***	.41***	.61***	.66***	—	
13. NA Typical	-.43***	-.38***	-.23**	-.12	.21**	.11	-.26***	-.29***	-.66***	-.44***	-.18*	-.08	—
14. NA Post	-.19*	-.12	-.28***	-.07	.27***	.14 [†]	-.28***	-.35***	-.25**	-.48***	-.03	-.07	.52***

Note. RSES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; BFIA = Big Five Inventory – Agreeableness; Enthusiasm = enthusiasm and openness of capitalization disclosure; Connection = capitalizing in a particular way to connect with one's partner; Concerns = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about a partner's response; Modesty = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about making a partner feel jealous; Enjoyment = enjoyment of capitalization interaction; PRCA Total = overall perceived positive responding on the Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts Scale; BMIS Typical = typical pleasant mood; BMIS Post = post-capitalization pleasant mood; PA Typical = typical positive affect; PA Post = post-capitalization positive affect; NA Typical = typical negative affect; NA Post = post-capitalization negative affect.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Capitalization Processes From Self-Esteem and Agreeableness

Predictor	Enthusiasm	Connection	Concerns	Modesty	Enjoyment	Perceived positive responding
	<i>b</i> 95% CI					
Self-esteem	0.32** [0.14, 0.50]	0.14 [-0.08, 0.36]	-0.25* [-0.49, -0.02]	-0.17 [-0.48, 0.14]	0.11 [†] [-0.02, 0.23]	1.27* [0.25, 2.28]
Agreeableness	0.07 [-0.08, 0.22]	0.23* [0.05, 0.42]	-0.01 [-0.21, 0.18]	0.20 [-0.06, 0.46]	0.13* [0.02, 0.23]	0.69 [-0.17, 1.55]
Self-esteem × agreeableness	0.13 [-0.07, 0.34]	0.07 [-0.18, 0.32]	-0.01 [-0.28, 0.27]	-0.19 [-0.54, 0.16]	0.01 [-0.13, 0.15]	-0.30 [-1.46, 0.86]

Note. CI = confidence interval; Enthusiasm = enthusiasm and openness of capitalization disclosure; Connection = capitalizing in a particular way to connect with one's partner; Concerns = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about a partner's response; Modesty = capitalizing in a particular way due to concerns about making a partner feel jealous; Enjoyment = enjoyment of capitalization interaction; Perceived positive responding = overall perceived positive responding on the Perceived Responses to Capitalization Attempts Scale.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Mood and Affect From Self-Esteem and Agreeableness

Predictor	Typical		Post-capitalization			
	Pleasant mood	Positive affect	Negative affect	Pleasant mood	Positive affect	Negative affect
	<i>b</i>					
	95% CI		95% CI			
Self-esteem	0.40*** [0.31, 0.49]	0.54*** [0.34, 0.74]	-0.29*** [-0.44, -0.14]	0.11** [0.04, 0.19]	0.39** [0.16, 0.62]	-0.09* [-0.17, -0.01]
Agreeableness	0.25*** [0.17, 0.32]	0.28** [0.11, 0.44]	-0.22** [-0.35, -0.10]	0.15*** [0.09, 0.22]	0.25** [0.06, 0.44]	-0.02 [-0.09, 0.05]
Self-esteem × agreeableness	-0.02 [-0.13, 0.08]	0.10 [-0.13, 0.33]	0.16† [-0.01, 0.34]	-0.20 [-0.07, 0.11]	0.09 [-0.17, 0.35]	-0.04 [-0.13, 0.05]

Note. CI = confidence interval; Pleasant mood = BMIS; Positive affect = PANAS Positive; Negative affect = PANAS Negative; † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.