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After All I Have Done For You: Self-silencing Accommodations Fuel Women's Post-Rejection Hostility

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Abstract

An experimental study tests if people's hostility after experiencing rejection is partly explained by the degree to which they had initially suppressed their own feelings and beliefs to please the source of rejection. This hypothesis emerges from the literatures on women's self-silencing and that on rejection-sensitivity, which has documented that rejection-sensitive women show strong responses to rejection, but are also likely to self-silence to please their partners. An online dating paradigm examined if this self-silencing drives post-rejection hostility among women. Participants were given the opportunity to read about a potential dating partner before meeting that person, and were randomly assigned to one of 3 experimental conditions that resulted in rejection from the potential date or from another dater. Self-silencing was captured as the suppression of tastes and opinions that clashed with those of the prospective partner. Self-silencing moderated the effect of rejection on hostility: Self-silencing to the prospective partner was associated with greater post-rejection hostility among women, but not men. Self-silencing to someone other than the rejecter was not predictive of hostility. Women's dispositional rejection-sensitivity predicted greater hostility after rejection, and self-silencing mediated this association. Efforts to secure acceptance through accommodation may help explain the paradoxical tendency of some people to show strong rejection-induced hostility toward those whose acceptance they have sought.

Keywords

self-silencing; rejection; rejection sensitivity; hostility; gender differences

When establishing new relationships, it is common for people to attract and please those who are the focus of their interest by suppressing their own opinions and feelings to seem more acceptable. While these efforts emerge as part of broader self-presentation strategies, they can be costly when they entail silencing a valued self-aspect. Silencing the self for the sake of relationships is a relational schema that is acquired through socialization (Jack, 1991) and is predictive of internalized negative affect, particularly among women (Duarte & Thompson, 1999; Harper, Dickson & Welsh, 2006; Jack & Dill, 1992). We propose that self-silencing accommodations should also have implications for how people respond to interpersonal rejection from people whose acceptance they value. Specifically, those who have silenced the self to establish a relationship will respond with hostility and anger to a greater degree than those who have not self-silenced in the same way, reflecting the

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relatively greater cost they have incurred. Because women are more likely to be socialized to use self-silencing to build and maintain relationships (Jack & Dill, 1992), the hostility displayed by women after interpersonal rejection may be moderated by the relatively greater efforts that they have made in order to attract those who ultimately reject them. Thus, the process linking self-silencing accommodations and post-rejection hostility is most likely to emerge among women. The present research tests this hypothesis.

Our proposal draws inspiration from the rejection-sensitivity (RS) model that conceptualizes sensitivity to rejection as the disposition to anxiously expect and readily perceive rejection in the behavior of others (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson et al., 2010). While people generally respond to social exclusion with hostility and aggression (Leary, Twenge & Quinlivan, 2006; Smart Richman & Leary, 2009), RS is especially predictive of hostile responses to real or perceived rejection in close relationships (Ayduk et al., 1999; Ayduk, Gyurak & Luerssen, 2008; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson et al., 2010). Recent work shows that relative to low RS people, those high in RS show increased effort to adapt to partners and peers (Aguilar et al., 2012; Berenson et al., 2010; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Reddy et al., 2010). Efforts such as those displayed by high RS people often entail self-silencing. Hence, a secondary aim of this work is to test if rejection-sensitive women make more self-silencing accommodations toward a partner, and if these efforts, in turn, predict rejection-sensitive women's hostility after rejection.

Self-silencing Accommodations as Relationship-building Efforts

People strive to appear similar to those whose acceptance they seek, conforming to the perceived values, tastes and attitudes of those individuals (Rowatt, Cunningham & Druen, 1998; Zanna & Pack, 1975). This accommodation is only natural; as summarized by Newcomb (1956), "interpersonal attraction always and necessarily varies with perceived similarity regarding important and relevant objects." This drive to appear more similar in order to seem more attractive seems to be automatic, though it can also be strategic (Jones, 1965). People seem to automatically adjust to accommodate their interaction partners, at least when a good connection may facilitate a good outcome.

People's efforts to form social rapport by presenting the self in a way that fits the needs of others can be costly when the accommodation entails the suppression of important parts of the self. This is one of the premises of the work of Jack and Dill (1992) exploring self-silencing and depression, and in the writings of Karen Horney (1937) on neurotic dependency. These bodies of work describe how women, in particular, are likely to give up or silence valued aspects of their selves for their relationships, suppressing the goals, values and feelings that might put them in conflict with a partner. Horney (1937) proposed that when people perceive that they have lower status than those whose acceptance or approval they need, people will be sensitized to rejection. She further observed that people would silence themselves to meet the perceived expectations of the source of approval and to prevent rejection. Decades later, Jack and Dill (1992), proposed that women are socialized to self-silence, i.e., to suppress their thoughts and feelings in relationships as a way of nourishing those relationships, in part because women have historically been given lower status than their male partners. However, when these efforts are neither recognized nor reciprocated, women may experience negative affect. Consistent with this theory, a body of cross-sectional research supports a link between self-silencing and depression among women (Duarte & Thompson, 1999; Gratch, Bassett, & Attra, 1995; Harper, Dickson & Welsh, 2006; Jack & Dill, 1992; Little, Welsh, Darling & Holmes, 2011). Other work suggests that when self-silencing and self-sacrificing for relationships are driven by fear of rejection and avoidance motives, self-sacrifice predicts negative affect, conflict, and less relationship satisfaction (Impett, Gable & Peplau, 2005).

The association between self-silencing and negative affect has been consistently documented among women, but not men. This sex difference is theorized to result from differences in the motivation driving the self-suppression. Horney (1937) and Jack and Dill (1992) proposed that women are socialized to self-silence as a means of forming important relationships, not simply to seem more attractive. When men self-suppress, they do so to gain influence over those they attract (Page et al., 1996; Remen et al., 2002; Ward, Bergner, & Kahn, 2003) or to enact a traditional gender role (Smolak, 2010). Furthermore, self-suppression in close relationships systematically predicts negative outcomes for women (Ayduk, May, Downey & Higgins, 2003; Harper et al., 2006; Jack & Dill, 1992; Thompson, 1995; Uebelacker, Courtnage, & Whisman, 2003), but not for men (Duarte & Thompson, 1999; Gratch et al., 1995). This difference occurs despite no sex differences in self-reported levels of self-silencing.

Hostile Responses to Rejection Fueled by Self-silencing

While research on the consequences of self-silencing has primarily focused on depression, it is possible that self-silencing could also fuel post-rejection hostility. When people accommodate towards others, but fail to establish a relationship as intended, people can experience a loss of agency, and such loss of control is known to increase the likelihood of post-rejection aggression (Warburton, Williams & Cairns, 2006). Moreover, several lines of research on intragroup dynamics (cf. Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1999) have shown that when people are invested in their social ties with others, but feel maltreated by those others, people respond with anger and hostility. This is particularly likely when people feel they have behaved in ways that should result in acceptance.

For those who are likely to make a significant effort to accommodate for acceptance, the process of self-silencing may destabilize their sense of self, especially after rejection when the valued goal has eluded them. Research on individual differences in responses to rejection has also shown that those who respond to rejection from potential romantic partners strongly also report a loss of self-concept clarity after rejection (Ayduk, Gyurak, & Luerssen, 2009), i.e., a sense of destabilization consistent with losing a part of the self. Such instability may magnify negative affect. If self-silencing in the pursuit of acceptance is associated with loss of self-concept clarity after rejection, any hostility shown by those who have accommodated after rejection may be due to the loss of sense of self. However, the self-silencing literature suggests that the act of suppressing the self is costly in and of itself, a surrender of a part of the self for others. When rejection occurs, the act of self-silencing is experienced as costly loss after an expensive emotional investment. While a loss of self-concept clarity may accompany this experience, and self-concept clarity may predict hostility after rejection as well, the effect of self-silencing should persist above and beyond any effect of a loss of self-concept clarity on post-rejection hostility.

In sum, prior research suggests that the extent to which people self-silence to gain acceptance from their partners may fuel their anger and hostility towards their partner following rejection. This link should be stronger among women, as they are more likely to have been socialized to use self-silencing to create and maintain relationships.

Rejection Sensitivity and Women's Responses to Rejection

A secondary goal of the present study is to reconcile a pattern of behavior shown by women who are highly rejection-sensitive. Women who are high in rejection-sensitivity (high RS) show especially strong hostility toward those who reject them (Ayduk et al., 1999), behavior that damages their relationships (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). However, recent research has also shown that high RS women may be especially likely to accommodate to those whose acceptance they seek (Aguilar et al., 2012; Edwards & Barber,

2010; London, Downey, Romero-Canyas, Rattan & Tyson, 2012; Romero-Canyas & Downey, 2005). In one study looking at non-conscious vocal accommodation—normative behavior during social interactions that increases rapport among interlocutors (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991; Gregory & Webster, 1996; Lakin & Chartrand, 2003; Pardo, Gibbons, Suppes & Krauss, 2012; Pardo, Jay & Kraus, 2010)—high RS women partnered with a stranger for a laboratory task were more likely to subtly change their pronunciation to sound more like that partner than were low RS women (Aguilar et al., 2012). Other studies have found that high RS women are also more likely to comply with requests for risky or unwanted sexual behavior from their partner (Berenson et al., 2012; Edwards & Barber, 2010), engage in potentially harmful behavior for their partners (Downey & Purdie, 2000), and self-silence in their relationships to prevent rejection (Ayduk, May, Downey & Higgins, 2003). Connecting the accommodation behavior of high RS women with their hostile responses to rejection has not been attempted.

We propose that self-silencing accommodations intended to secure the acceptance of others may account partly for high RS women's anger and hostility after rejection. High RS women should be more likely than low RS women to accommodate to an attractive social target and they should respond with greater hostility to rejection from that target. The intensity of the hostility should be a function of the degree of self-silencing accommodations prior to rejection.

Present Study

The current study tests the relation between self-silencing to a potential partner and hostile responses to rejection from that partner. We hypothesized that, among women, self-silencing accommodations to gain acceptance would predict post-rejection hostility when the rejecter is the person to whom one has accommodated. Given the robust effect of rejection on hostility, we explore if the degree of self-silencing accommodations to a partner moderates the effect of rejection on people's hostility and anger.

We designed an experimental study that captured both accommodations intended to increase similarity to an attractive potential dating partner, and hostility once rejection from that partner occurs. Given the importance of online dating services as a forum for initiating romantic relationships (Ellin, 2009), our paradigm simulated online dating. We created 3 experimental conditions: one captured responses to rejection from a potential date to whom participants had a chance to accommodate; a second captured responses to rejection from someone to whom participants had not had a chance to accommodate, and a third was a no-rejection control condition. We operationalized self-silencing accommodations as the number of accommodations made to present oneself as similar to the potential dating partner, focusing on silencing of preferences that do not align them with those of the prospective dating partner (similar to Zanna & Pack, 1975). To assess post-rejection hostility, we coded for hostility expressed by participants after rejection in their written impressions of their partners. Our design allows us to test self-silencing accommodations as a moderator of the rejection-hostility link, not as a mediator, given that the self-silencing accommodations precede the rejection by days.

Using our paradigm, we tested the following specific hypotheses: 1) rejection conditions would elicit greater hostility than the control condition; 2) accommodations to the prospective partner would moderate effect of rejection on hostility among participants who were rejected by the partner for whom they self-silenced, but that this accommodation-hostility link would only emerge among women. We tested for the possibility that loss of self-concept clarity could explain the hypothesized association between self-silencing accommodations and hostility. We also tested a secondary hypothesis: rejection-sensitivity

would be associated with women's hostility after rejection, and this association would be mediated by the extent to which women self-silenced when accommodating to the rejecter.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Single college students were recruited for a two-session study described as an investigation of nonphysical characteristics that predict successful online matchmaking ($N = 137$; age: $M = 20.01$, $SD = 2.05$; 42.34 % males). They were randomly assigned to one of 3 experimental conditions, described below. Participants indicated the gender of the person they would like to meet and were led to believe their match would be of the preferred gender.

Online Pre-Session—Participants completed a confidential online questionnaire on personal preferences (e.g., favorite movies, TV shows, food, music), which they believed would be used to find them an appropriate match from the pool of prospective dating partners. In actuality, this information was used to create profiles used in Session 1 (details below). Participants were then scheduled to come to the laboratory 7 to 14 days later for Session 1.

Session 1—Participants first completed the measures of RS, task investment and self-concept clarity, described below. They were then asked to write a biographical profile that would be read by their match.

Before writing, participants were given a profile to read. A third of participants, all assigned to the **novel rejection** condition (detailed below) were told that the profile was from a past participant and could be used as a guide to topics about which to write. Remaining participants were told that the profile belonged to their match. In truth, all participants read a profile tailored to them based on preferences they had listed in the pre-session. The profiles matched participants along political orientation, geographical origin, and on some tastes and preferences, but mismatched participants on other preferences. Matched preferences were intended to increase feelings of similarity and attraction, while mismatches were included to make the profile seem realistic and to provide points of contention that might direct some to silence their opinions. Participants were led to assume the match was from their own cultural/ethnic background through matching on signals of ethnic identity, specifically tastes in music (Marshall & Eberhardt, 2009). Apart from these matched dimensions, Session 1 profiles were identical.

In writing their own profiles, participants were prompted to share their various preferences (e.g., favorite movies, music) just as the author of the profile they read had done. After they had created their profiles, participants received \$10 and were told that they would be scheduled for Session 2 during which they would meet their match.

Session 2—Participants arrived for Session 2 about 7 to 14 days after Session 1. A same-sex experimenter informed participants that they would meet their match, who was likely waiting in a nearby room, have a few minutes to get to know him or her, and then answer some questions about the interaction. The experimenter asked the participant to complete a mood questionnaire and told the participant that he/she would check whether the match had arrived. Five minutes later, the experimenter returned to deliver the manipulation.

In the **control condition** ($N = 51$; 39.2% male), participants were told that the match did not come because of a last minute scheduling conflict. All participants in this condition had read their match's profile in Session 1 prior to writing their own profile. This condition was included to establish whether self-silencing accommodations would lead to hostility only

when an actual rejection takes place. The remaining participants were told that the match had read the participant's profile and had chosen not to proceed with the meeting: in the **novel rejection condition** ($N = 41$; 41.5% male), participants had read a past participant's profile prior to writing their own, but in the **match rejection condition** ($N = 45$, 46.7% male), our key condition, participants had read their match's profile prior to writing their own. The novel rejection condition and match rejection conditions were included to test if the link between self-silencing accommodations and post-rejection hostility emerges only when one has accommodated to the rejection source and not to a random third party.

All participants were then told that, though the meeting would not happen, the investigators wanted them to complete the remaining questionnaires. These included post-manipulation mood scales and open-ended questions about their overall impressions of their match. In the control and match rejection conditions, participants reread their match's profile to remind them of their match. In the novel rejection condition, participants read their purported match's profile for the first time. In actuality this was a non-tailored profile that had been pilot-tested and was perceived by students as highly attractive. Figure 1 depicts the experimental design and procedure.

Measures

RS Questionnaire (RSQ)—The RSQ (Downey & Feldman, 1996) administered in Session 1 consists of 18 scenarios in which rejection is possible (e.g., "You ask your friend to do you a big favor"). For each scenario, participants indicate 1) how anxious or concerned they would be about the scenario's outcome (1 = "very unconcerned"; 6 = "very concerned"), and 2) how likely the scenario's outcome would be acceptance (1 = "very unlikely"; 6 = "very likely"). For each scenario, expectation of acceptance is reverse-coded to capture expectation of rejection and is multiplied by the anxiety rating to yield an index of anxious expectation of rejection. The RS score is the average of the weighted scores across scenarios ($\alpha = .83$; $M = 9.67$, $SD = 3.20$).

Self-Concept Clarity Scale—This scale (Campbell et al., 1996) was administered in Session 1 and includes 12 items like "My beliefs about myself often conflict with one another." Ratings (1 = "completely disagree"; 5 = "completely agree"). Responses were averaged ($\alpha = .88$, $M = 3.16$, $SD = .79$) so that higher numbers indicated more clarity. Self-concept clarity was included in analyses to enable assessment of the effects of making accommodations in one's profile, independent of the effects of having an unstable self-concept (Campbell et al., 1996) and also to account for the loss of self-concept clarity that results from rejection (Ayduk et al., 2009). Thus, we also measured self-concept clarity after the rejection, as a manipulation check. This measure consisted of the original self-concept clarity scale reworded to measure state feelings (e.g., "Right now I feel that I am not really the person that I appear to be"). Only items whose rewording fit state self-concept clarity were kept, thus two items were dropped ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.74$, $SD = .84$). We used these two measurements of self-concept clarity to rule out the possibility that a loss of a sense of personal identity accounted for the association of self-suppression behaviors and post-rejection hostility.

Task Investment Index—Investment was assessed with positive mood items from the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Participants rated (1 = "very slightly or not at all;" 5 = "extremely") how much they were feeling: interested, excited, and enthusiastic ($\alpha = .81$; $M = 2.93$, $SD = .88$). These positive, approach-emotions items are predictive of investment in the interaction and serve to account for differences in value the individual is placing on the social interaction (Dittes & Kelley,

1956). Similar measures have been used previously (Ayduk et al., 1999; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Reddy, et al., 2010).

Self-silencing Accommodations—An accommodations score was obtained by comparing the information in three documents: the information the participant provided online about his/her preferences for music, movies, activities, and so on prior to coming into the lab (pre-session), the profile the participant wrote in Session 1, and the profile presented to him/her as being from the match or from a random past participant. Four trained coders recorded the number of times the participant included an item in the pre-session questionnaire but excluded this item in the profile he/she wrote in Session 1 when the match or sample mentioned not liking that item. For example, a participant could have listed *Chicago* as a favorite movie in the pre-session questionnaire and then read a tailored profile that mentioned not liking "movies with Renée Zellweger." If the participant then excluded *Chicago* from his or her profile, this exclusion was coded as a self-silencing accommodation. The mean number of such behaviors recorded by the four coders was used to index *self-silencing accommodations* (Intraclass Correlations (ICC) = .84; $M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.44$; $Range = .25 - 10.50$). Coders also marked the number of exclusions participants made of items that were not mentioned in the match or sample profile (ICC = .93; $M = 9.52$, $SD = 2.69$) and of items that the match or past participant (sample) had in common with the participant (ICC = .91; $M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.76$). We computed an index of these non-accommodating exclusions by adding the two ($M = 13.09$, $SD = 3.81$) and used this in all analyses involving accommodations as a control variable, a proxy for participants' tendency to exclude information. We also computed an index of any additional information about tastes and preferences that participants included in their public profile, but had not disclosed in the online pre-session ($\alpha = .84$; $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.38$).

Change in rejected mood—As a manipulation check, participants rated how "rejected" and "accepted" (reverse coded) they felt (1 = "very slightly or not at all"; 5 = "extremely") immediately before ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .62$) and after ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .96$) the manipulation. We subtracted the pre-manipulation score from the post-manipulation score to calculate change in feelings of rejection. One person did not complete these items. Residuals of time 1 assessment predicting time 2 scores yielded the same patterns as those we report.

Hostility—After being told either of a scheduling conflict or that the match did not want to meet, participants provided free-form written responses to the question: "What were your overall impressions of your match?" Nine coders rated the extent to which these responses expressed various emotions and attitudes (1 = "not at all"; 8 = "extremely"). We averaged coders' ratings for each emotion (ICC ranges: .74 – .96); however, because these averaged scores were strongly positively skewed, the average rating of each emotion were recoded into a dichotomous score of whether the emotion was present to any extent (score=1) or not present at all (score=0). These dichotomized values were entered into a factor analysis that revealed 1 factor comprised of 7 negative responses: hostility, anger, frustration, disapproval, aggression, derogation, and feeling insulted. The mean of these responses (ICC = .89, $M = .42$, $SD = .34$) was used to index expressed *hostility*.

Results

We used linear regression to test our hypotheses. We assigned dummy codes to sex and each condition, although only two condition dummy variables are entered on any one analysis. All variables were centered around their sample mean, but when a variable was the dependent variable it was left uncentered. Dummy variables were centered to account for differences in the number of participants in the groups. When testing interactions, if these proved significant, standard simple slope analysis was used to test the effect of the predictor

on the outcome in each condition for each sex: as prescribed by Aiken and West (1993), during simple slope analyses the dummy variables involved in the interaction of interest were recoded (0 or 1) so the comparison group was the group of interest (coded as 0). During simple slope analyses, all continuous predictors and controls remained set at their mean (see Aiken & West, 1991).

Change in Rejected Mood

As a manipulation check, we tested for an effect of condition on change in rejected mood relative to the control condition. Change in rejected mood was regressed on the task investment index, dummy variables for match rejection and novel rejection conditions, sex, and the interactions between sex and condition. The rejection conditions elicited a greater increase in feelings of rejection than the control condition (match rejection condition: $b = .49$, $t(128) = 3.19$, $p = .01$, $d = .65$; novel rejection condition: $b = .31$, $t(128) = 1.96$, $p = .05$, $d = .42$), with no difference between rejection conditions (when random rejection is the base condition, match rejection $b = .18$, $t(128) = 1.12$, $p = .26$). We tested for sex differences, but the sex and sex by condition effects were nonsignificant (all p s $> .15$).

Change in Self-Concept Clarity

A second manipulation check consisted of checking if self-concept clarity was reduced after rejection. Given that the time 1 measure of self-concept clarity was a trait measure and the time 2 (post-rejection) was a state measure, we used the residuals from a simple regression model (time 1 predicting time 2) as the index of change ($SD = .66$). However, the same pattern of results emerges if we use a difference score as the index of change. Change in self-concept clarity was regressed on the dummy variables for match rejection condition and the novel rejection condition, controlling for the investment index (centered). Consistent with past work, participants in the match rejection condition showed a significant loss in self-concept clarity ($b = -.31$, $t(133) = -2.34$, $p = .02$, $\beta = -.22$, $d = .72$) relative to participants in the control condition, but not relative to participants in the novel rejection condition ($b = -.19$, $t(133) = -1.37$, $p = .38$, $\beta = -.14$, $d = .44$). Novel rejection and the control condition did not differ significantly ($b = -.12$, $t(133) = -.88$, $p = .79$, $\beta = -.08$, $d = .28$).

Self-silencing Accommodations and Post-Rejection Hostility

Our central hypothesis involves self-silencing accommodations predicting post-rejection hostility for women, i.e., self-silencing accommodations should moderate the effect of rejection on hostility. Therefore, we used one regression model to test both the effect of condition on hostility and to test if self-silencing accommodations predicted more hostility in the match rejection condition, but not in the other conditions, and whether this effect was more pronounced among women. Women and the control condition were the comparison groups. We tested the three-way interaction between self-silencing accommodations and the dummy variables for sex and the two rejection conditions (i.e., Self-silencing Accommodations $\times$ Sex $\times$ Match Rejection condition and Self-silencing Accommodations $\times$ Sex $\times$ Novel Rejection condition), including all the necessary two-way interactions (Sex $\times$ Match Rejection, Sex $\times$ Novel Rejection, Sex $\times$ Self-silencing Accommodations, Self-silencing Accommodations $\times$ Match Rejection and Self-silencing Accommodations $\times$ Novel Rejection). Dummy variables were centered to allow us to test the main effects. We controlled for the investment index and for the index of non-accommodating exclusions in the participant's profile, to control for participants' tendency to exclude information in general. Given our results with self-concept clarity, we also controlled for trait self-concept clarity, but all results reported here, including interactions and simple slopes remain significant at $p < .05$ if we do not control for self-concept clarity.

Level of Accommodation

We tested for an effect of condition on self-silencing accommodation. The index of self-silencing accommodations was regressed on the task investment index, dummy variables for match rejection and novel rejection conditions, sex, and the interactions between sex and condition. This analysis yielded no differences in accommodations between conditions (when novel rejection is the base condition, match rejection condition: $b = -.25$, $t(128) = -.89$, $p > .37$, $d = .17$; match malfunction condition: $b = -.19$, $t(128) = -.69$, $p > .49$, $d = .13$). The sex and sex by condition effects were nonsignificant (all p s $> .15$). While we would have expected fewer accommodations in the novel rejection condition, where participants read the tailored profile as though it was an example of what other daters wrote, the pattern is consistent with the tendency that people show to shift automatically toward others. The example may have been interpreted, in some way, not just as a model of the profiles, but also as a prototype of the person that participants were likely to meet. Combined with the tailoring that had been intended to seem like a compatible match, the profile may have created enough attraction to activate self-presentation strategies.

Hypothesis 1: Does Rejection Predict Hostility?—The main effects of conditions allow us to test if rejection elicited more hostility than the control condition. As predicted by the literature, we found main effects of condition. Hostility was significantly higher in the rejection conditions (match rejection: $b = .19$, $t(122) = 2.78$, $p = .01$, $d = .57$; novel rejection: $b = .24$, $t(122) = 3.47$, $p = .01$, $d = .73$) than in the control condition. Match and novel rejection conditions did not differ significantly from each other ($p = .48$).

Hypothesis 2: Do Accommodations Predict Hostility?—To test if accommodations predict hostility after rejection from those to whom people have accommodated, we looked at whether at least one of the three-way interactions was significant. The interaction of accommodations, sex, and the match rejection condition was significant ($b = -.26$, $t(122) = -2.45$, $p = .02$), indicating that self-silencing accommodations predicts hostility differently in at least one of the conditions for at least one of the sexes. To understand this interaction, we computed the simple slopes for the effect of self-silencing accommodations on hostility in each condition for each sex.

For women in the match rejection condition, self-silencing accommodations predicted significantly more hostility ($b = .19$, $t(122) = 3.06$, $p = .003$, $\beta = .82$). Self-silencing accommodations were not significantly related to women's hostility in the other conditions (control: $b = -.02$, $t(122) = -.70$, $p = .48$, $\beta = -.10$; novel rejection: $b = -.07$, $t(122) = -1.53$, $p = .13$, $\beta = -.28$). As hypothesized, self-silencing accommodations were not significantly related to men's hostility in any condition (match rejection: $b = -.03$, $t(122) = -.47$, $p = .64$, $\beta = -.11$; control: $b = .02$, $t(122) = .34$, $p = .74$, $\beta = .09$; novel rejection: $b = .01$, $t(122) = .07$, $p = .95$, $\beta = .03$). Figure 2 depicts the predicted values of hostility from the model for men and women.

These findings support the hypothesis that self-silencing accommodations made to a match led to hostility among women when the match rejected the participant, but not when a) accommodations were made to a random past participant, or b) when the meeting with the match was canceled due to a conflict. Self-silencing accommodations moderate the effect of rejection on hostility when the accommodations had been made to the rejecter.

Given our findings with self-concept clarity, we tested if the change in self-concept clarity accounted for the association of the self-silencing accommodations and post-rejection hostility. We entered the index of change self-concept clarity change into the model (rather than Time 1 self-concept clarity) and entered its interaction with sex. Including these does not alter the pattern of findings reported above; the three-way interaction and simple slopes

of the association between self-silencing accommodations and post-rejection hostility remain significant. Hence, we can rule out the possibility that self-concept clarity changes account for the association of self-silencing and post-rejection hostility we detected.

Finally, we computed a model in which the index of general exclusions made by participants was entered as predictor of post-rejection hostility, interacting with sex and the conditions, rather than treating general exclusions as a control. General exclusions do not predict post-rejection hostility or alter the pattern of associations between self-silencing accommodations and hostility. Similarly, a model where the number of additions to the profile relative to the online pre-session was entered as a predictor and allowed to interact with sex and the dummy variables for the rejection conditions revealed that additions did not significantly predict post-rejection hostility, nor did they alter our findings.

High RS Women's Hostile Responses to Rejection

A secondary goal of this research was to test the hypothesis that rejection-sensitive women's hostility is partly due to their greater pre-rejection investment in the rejecter. Hence, RS scores should predict women's accommodations to their match and women's hostile responses in the match rejection condition. We focused on the match rejection condition alone, the only condition in which self-silencing accommodations predicted hostile responses to rejection.

We regressed hostility on RS scores for participants in the match rejection condition, controlling for Time 1 self-concept clarity and investment. RS significantly predicted post-rejection hostility ($b = .05$, $t(39) = 2.11$, $p = .04$, $\beta = .45$). Sex was not a significant moderator of this effect ($b = .02$, $t(39) = .56$, $p = .58$). Supporting our predictions, RS also predicted greater accommodations before rejection ($b = .13$, $t(38) = 2.27$, $p = .05$, $\beta = .37$). This effect was qualified by an interaction between sex and RS ($b = -.23$, $t(38) = -2.47$, $p = .02$). RS was a significant predictor of women's accommodations ($b = .23$, $t(38) = 3.19$, $p = .003$, $\beta = .65$), but not men's ($b = -.003$, $t(38) = -.04$, $p = .97$, $\beta = .00$).

Given these two patterns, we tested if self-silencing accommodations mediated the RS–hostility link among women using a non-parametric bootstrapping procedure suitable for smaller samples like ours (for details on this procedure, see Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We created a bootstrap sample of 100,000 by randomly sampling observations with replacement from the original dataset of women in the match rejection condition. A bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) 95% confidence interval was then calculated. For significant mediation to occur, the 95% confidence interval should exclude zero. Accounting for accommodations reduced the effect of RS on hostility among women from .051 (c) to .016 (c'), making the association of RS to hostility non-significant ($p = .65$). The estimate for this indirect effect (ab) for women was .035, 95% CI: [.001, .127]. For men, the effect of RS on hostility (.053) was not significantly reduced when accommodations was accounted for (.052). The estimate of the indirect effect for men was .002, 95% CI: [–.016, .030]. Thus, accommodations significantly mediated of the relation between RS and hostility in women but not men. Figure 3 depicts the mediation model for women.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first experimental study to show that hostile reactions to rejection are influenced by how much the target of rejection had accommodated in the pursuit of acceptance from the rejection source. Thus, the findings reveal a process that sustains the link between rejection and hostility (cf. Ayduk et al., 2003; DeWall, Twenge, Gitter, & Baumeister, 2009; Leary, Twenge & Quinlivan, 2006; Warburton et al., 2006). Moreover, the current study shows that people who are likely to be accommodating during

the formation of relationships are also likely to behave in ways that make further rejection more likely when they perceive that they have been wronged. Our findings suggest that self-silencing accommodations fuel post-rejection hostility and rule out the possibility that these findings were due to the loss of self-concept clarity that is associated with rejection.

This study captured self-silencing behavior in a controlled setting, but yielded results consistent with past self-silencing work that has relied on scales to measure self-silencing. Our methodology allowed us to rule out the possibility that our findings were due to a general tendency to reveal less information in the profile, or with the tendency to reveal even more personal information in the profiles relative to the initial assessment of preferences. Either of these patterns might be conceptualized as efforts to impress a potential partner.

A key aspect of the link between self-silencing accommodations and hostility is that people feel rejected by those to whom they had accommodated. When a scheduling conflict precluded the potential romantic partner from meeting the participant, the degree to which the participant had accommodated toward their partner was not predictive of the hostility they displayed. Similarly, post-rejection hostility was unrelated to the accommodations made by participants in the novel rejection condition, those who read a profile that, though tailored to them, was presented as a sample profile. This suggests that participants may have felt maltreated by their match in the face of their accommodating efforts. When the self-silencing and hostility link manifests in people's relationships, the sense of outrage and unfairness felt by those who have been rejected may seem inexplicable to the rejecters, who are unaware of the individual's efforts to accommodate. The invisibility of the efforts that moderate hostile reactions may make post-rejection hostility particularly perplexing to their targets.

Participants in the novel rejection condition showed similar levels of accommodation as participants in the two other conditions. This finding is consistent with lab studies of dyadic rejection where the rejection condition was closer to our novel rejection than to our match rejection (cf. Ayduk et al., 1999; Ayduk et al., 2008). Participants in the novel rejection were as hostile as their peers in the match rejection condition, but their hostility was not associated to their pre-rejection self-silencing. Rejection generally elicits hostility, but in each situation when rejection happens, different aspects of the history preceding the rejection may be associated with the hostility. Participants in the novel rejection condition had made other investments in their match, efforts that could also moderate post-rejection hostility, such as continuing to participate in the study and attending the second session. Thus, even if they had no knowledge of who their match was, as the participants in the other conditions did, those in the novel rejection had made efforts to establish a connection that were unsuccessful. We believe that self-silencing is not the only antecedent to rejection that can moderate the emotional responses to rejection; loss of self or authenticity (cf. Impett et al., 2012), loss of control (cf. Warburton et al., 2006) or concerns with injustice are among the processes identified by research that can have similar moderating effects.

Some of these moderating processes are considered in recent theoretical models (cf. Smart Richman & Leary, 2009) of the impact of rejection on people's motivation for antisocial, prosocial or socially avoidant behavior. The present study maps a process and "timeline" of how people's normative efforts to prevent rejection and secure acceptance can motivate antisocial responses to social exclusion. This contribution is informed by the RS model, which proposes that some people are likely to try harder to avoid rejection, even if they must self-silence, and that those very people are likely to respond with hostility when their prosocial efforts fail.

The findings of the present study are also consistent with research that has shown that self-sacrifice for the sake of relationships or to avoid conflict is associated with negative interpersonal emotions (Impett, Gable & Peplau, 2005). This link is particularly strong when avoidance motives drive the self-sacrifice (Impett, Peplau & Gable, 2005). Sacrificing and concealing one's emotions for one's partners is particularly harmful when people experience the sacrifice as a loss of authenticity (Impett et al., 2012), as women who self-silence presumably do.

The present study is consistent with work showing that rejection from potential dating partners is associated with a loss of self-concept clarity (Ayduk et al., 2009). We did not find that loss of self-concept clarity was associated with post-rejection hostility among women, but ancillary analyses suggested that decreases in self-concept clarity were associated with men's increased hostility after rejection from the match. This hints at a possible mechanism for explaining men's hostility in dyadic settings.

Sex differences in the outcomes associated with self-silencing

The sex differences that emerged in the study are consistent with the majority of the work in self-silencing. Researchers have posited that self-silencing behaviors (i.e., not voicing one's opinions, needs and feelings) tend to have a different meaning for men (Jack, 2011; Smolak, 2010). Men do not self-silence to form and nourish dyadic relationships, but rather to enact a traditional definition of a masculine sex role, one that entails little emotion expression. In the present study, men did make accommodations to their match, consistent with past work (e.g. Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010; Harper et al., 2006). However, the particular form of accommodation we examined did not predict men's reactions to the rejection. Perhaps men are socialized to self-suppress in most situations, and therefore do not experience that self-suppression as an additional cost when it is followed by rejection.

Another possible venue for understanding sex differences in self-silencing as they relate to rejection is to consider the source of social connection and its value to men and women. Given the relatively greater importance of collective interdependence vs. close relationships among men (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999; Romero-Canyas, Downey, Reddy et al., 2010), it is possible that after a rejection from a group, the degree of men's accommodations to that group would predict post-rejection hostility. Alternatively, these sex differences in terms of collective versus relational sources of connection may only manifest in meeting strangers; once a bond has been established, the sex difference may be less pronounced. Work linking self-sacrifice to relationship outcomes (Impett et al., 2005; 2012) and work on self-silencing in married couples (Whiffen, Foot & Thompson, 2007) suggest that this may be the case.

Rejection-sensitive women's post-rejection hostility—We used the study to attempt to reconcile the behavior of highly rejection-sensitive women toward people whose acceptance they seek. As in past research, high RS women engaged in prosocial accommodation when it was reasonable to expect it would help them gain acceptance, but displayed great hostility when their accommodative efforts were met with a rejection that could not be undone by continued prosocial efforts. By focusing on the "if...then" contingency operating, it is possible to predict whether someone high in RS will behave in a prosocial or antisocial way and by looking at switches in the contingency operating, it is possible to predict switches in behavior

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was intended to capture a cognitive-affective process linking a behavior that is charged with meaning for the individual, self-silencing, to a strong emotional response. The experience of participants in this controlled experiment hardly mirrors that of rejection or

rejection-themed conflict in ongoing or established relationships, where the processes linking self-silencing, rejection and hostility may unfold differently. However, to the degree that silencing the self is interpreted as an investment in one's partner, rejection and rejection-themed conflict may elicit particularly strong and negative reactions from those who have silenced the self the most. Assuming that those who self-silence maintain, consciously or unconsciously, a record of what they have invested in the relationship over time, rejection in ongoing relationships should produce even stronger responses, including the outcomes most closely associated with self-silencing, namely depression. Consistent with this, researchers have linked self-silencing to spouses with increased symptoms of depression for both sexes (Whiffen et al., 2007).

In addition to the generalizability of the finding from the initial steps of a relationship to established relationships, another aspect of the studies needs further exploration: the limits of the association of self-silencing and post-rejection hostility. Does the association emerge in face-to-face interactions and could self-silencing accommodations predict more extreme forms of aggression? We gave participants a means of expressing hostility by prompting them to write about their overall impressions of their match. If given the means to express more extreme forms of aggression, would women use the opportunity after being rejected? Similarly, the question remains of whether self-silencing predicts general hostility or hostility that is directed exclusively at the rejecter. We coded the content of a description of the match and instructed coders to code the description of the match, but this still allows for generalized hostility to permeate the descriptions. Though, self-silencing accommodations were only associated with hostility expressed in the essays when the rejecter was the same person to whom one had accommodated, future work can test if self-silencing moderates post-rejection hostility directed at people other than the rejecter.

Conclusion

In order for relationships to function, people must accommodate to their partners, ceding over space and sometimes prioritizing the goals of their partners above their own. This pattern of behavior allows for rapport and facilitates interactions, but it creates a bond that when broken results in backlash. Those socialized to use self-silencing accommodations and who are particularly concerned with rejection are more likely to enter relationships by using such strategies; unfortunately, the very behaviors that allow them to establish close relationships become the fuel for anger and hostility that can destroy the social ties that are so highly valued.

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Highlights

We test if relationship-building efforts fuel hostility after rejection.

We focus on self-silencing, the suppression of the self for the sake of relationships.

Self-silencing to a prospective partner predicts post-rejection hostility for women.

Women's self-silencing mediates the link between rejection-sensitivity and hostility.

Self-silencing was not predictive of men's responses to rejection.

Figure 1.

Key steps in the three experimental conditions. All participants completed an identical online questionnaire. Information from that questionnaire was used to create a tailored match profile (the template is available from the authors). To maintain control across conditions, in Session 1 all participants read the profile individually tailored to them, but only in the match rejection and control condition was the profile presented as being from the match. In the novel rejection it was presented as an example of the profiles people create; when rejection from the novel match happened in Session 2, participants were shown a different profile, that of their supposed match, though in actuality it was a previously tested profile that had been rated as likeable.

(A) Women

(B) Men

Figure 2.

Predicted values from regression models illustrating the association of self-silencing accommodations in Session 1 to post-rejection hostility in Session 2 as a function of condition and sex of participant.

Notes:

1. Low accommodating depicts predicted values for participants 1 SD below the sample mean on self-silencing accommodations. High accommodating depicts the predicted values for participants 1 SD above the sample mean on self-silencing accommodations.

2. Error bars depict 1 standard error of the estimate above and 1 below the predicted value.

Figure 3.

Mediation model for women in the match rejection condition. Self-silencing accommodations significantly mediate the effect of rejection-sensitivity on post-rejection hostility for women.