The costs of being put on a pedestal: Effects of feeling over-idealized

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Abstract
This research explored the possibility of feeling over-idealized, or "put on a pedestal" by a partner, examining whether there is an optimal level of perceived idealization, such that too little or too much is detrimental. Perceived over-idealization was manipulated experimentally with 99 dating couples (Study 1), and in surveys of 89 married (Study 2) and 156 dating couples (Study 3). Study 1 found that participants physically distanced themselves from their partners following a perceived over-idealization manipulation. Study 2 found curvilinear associations (i.e., positive up to a point, then negative) of satisfaction with perceived idealization of traits and abilities. Study 3 found a similar curvilinear association of perceived idealization of abilities with satisfaction, which appeared to be mediated by reduced accommodation and possibly also by threat to self, as suggested by theory.

Keywords
Idealization, perceived regard, positive illusions, relationship satisfaction

A pedestal is as much a prison as any other small space.

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People devote much effort attempting to understand how their relationship partners feel about them. In general, people want to be regarded positively by partners and might even enjoy feeling idealized to some extent. However, idealization may become uncomfortable when a partner puts one "on a pedestal," expecting great things that one feels unlikely to achieve. This article focuses on perceived idealization: the difference between (a) self-perceptions of traits and abilities and (b) perceptions of how a partner sees one's traits and abilities. Perceived over-idealization occurs when perceptions of a partner's positive evaluation of oneself meaningfully exceeds one's own positive self-evaluation. Thus, perceived idealization (including perceived over-idealization) is in the eye of the perceiver and does not directly account for a partner's actual feelings about oneself. The current research examined perceived idealization in samples of dating and married couples, employing both an experimental manipulation and two surveys.

Because it is important to communicate positive regard for relationship partners (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), partners may be tempted to provide effusive praise. However, at the same time, people have a desire to feel that their closest partners understand them and value their individual qualities (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). In a situation of perceived over-idealization, a well-meaning partner may attempt to demonstrate positive regard with the unintended but adverse effect of communicating a lack of understanding for the partner's strengths and weaknesses. Perceived idealization could also create problems for coordinating lives, roles, and responsibilities if partners do not feel accurately known. The goal of the present studies is to explore the possibility that there might be such a thing as too much perceived positive regard from a partner and to examine the potentially detrimental relationship effects of over-idealization. This work would have implications for relationship functioning and may suggest caution in communicating positive regard within relationships.

Direct examination of perceived idealization appears to be absent from the literature. A large body of work has considered benefits of actual partner idealization (e.g., Miller, Niehus, & Huston, 2006; Murray et al., 2011; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), a few studies have examined perceptions of a partner's regard for oneself (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000), and one study tested effects of feeling inferior to a romantic partner (Murray, Aloni, et al., 2009). This work suggests that idealization is always good and the more the better, but if indeed there is a limit, it is important to identify and understand. If an optimal level can be identified, therapists and relationship educators would want to encourage moderation in communicating idealization to one's partner. In addition, none of these studies looked at perceived idealization: my perception of my partner's regard for me, controlling for my self-perception. Furthermore, none have differentiated idealization of traits versus abilities.

Importance of perceptions of partners

A growing literature suggests that perceptions of how partners feel about each other may matter more than how partners actually feel about themselves and each other (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Murray et al., 1996). Recent research has compellingly demonstrated that perceptions of a partner's responsiveness and understanding of oneself influence

relationship well-being (Reis, 2007; see Reis et al., 2004, for a review). Indeed, the difference between self-perceptions of traits and abilities versus perceptions of how a partner sees one's traits and abilities seems likely to be the most direct source of a possible sense of over-idealization, and is thus the focus of this research. (A partner's actual view of oneself is likely also influential and may be mediated by one's perception of the partner's view of oneself. Thus, the comparison of self-views to perceived partner regard seems more direct than comparison of self-views with actual partner perceptions.)

Finding an optimal level of idealization

Baumeister (1989) theorized that slight-to-moderate distortion of the world promotes optimal functioning. Research on actual idealization, or "positive illusions," in relationships (as opposed to the present focus on *perceived* idealization) indicates that both actually idealizing one's partner and actually being idealized by one's partner contribute to greater relationship satisfaction (Murray et al., 1996). Moderately positive illusions may be desirable because esteem feels good and may encourage movement toward the partner's slightly higher standard. A positive illusion that feels too extreme, however, may create a sense of worry about living up to lofty, perhaps unreasonable, expectations. As noted earlier, to our knowledge, no existing studies of actual idealization have considered that there might be an optimal level of what might be considered a positive relationship process. In other words, there might be a point beyond which perceived idealization by a partner could be detrimental. Important nonlinear effects (i.e., increases to an optimal point, followed by decreases) might have been overlooked due to the emphasis in contemporary research on linear relations (Grant & Schwartz, 2011). However, many processes normally considered beneficial have shown detrimental effects at higher levels. For example, in the workplace, a curvilinear relationship exists between generosity and productivity (Flynn, 2003). Similarly, conscientiousness and emotional stability have nonlinear effects on job performance (Le et al., 2011).

Proposed mechanisms for negative effects of perceived over-idealization

The experience of perceived over-idealization is likely to generate ambivalence by simultaneously creating feelings of increased and decreased dependence on a relationship. Relationships function best when partners depend equally on one another. Interdependence theory emphasizes relative dependence on the relationship, defined as the extent to which an individual relies on a relationship for fulfilling important needs (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). According to Rusbult and Van Lange (2003), "The concepts of dependence and power are inextricably related, in that the extent that one person is relatively more dependent, the partner is relatively more powerful" (p. 355). Over-idealized persons may come to believe that their partners are more dependent than themselves on the relationship, fostering a situation of asymmetric dependence and perhaps diminishing the over-idealized partner's motivation to be responsive to the partner's needs. Interdependence theory identifies diagnostic situations in which relationship partners must react to dependence, one of which occurs when interests conflict and

relationship partners must decide whether to accommodate or to pursue self-interests (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Accommodative behavior declines as dependence decreases (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991).

Conversely, being over-idealized may increase dependence by making one afraid of failing to live up to partner's expectations and by threatening personal autonomy, which would lead to feelings of insecurity. Interdependent relationships influence one's freedom to act independently and, at healthy levels, it is adaptive to compensate for these costs by valuing the partner and thus increasing dependence (Murray, Holmes, et al., 2009). However, partner idealization that exceeds self-views may create an imbalance of perceived valuing among partners and produce excessive expectations that pose a threat to the self.

Thus, two mechanisms are proposed, one expected to operate through decreased dependence (reducing accommodation, because one feels so highly valued that it is not necessary) and one expected to operate through increased dependence (due to threat to self from the risk of failure to meet partner's expectations, and which might also raise worries over one's inability to attract other relationship partners).

Reduced accommodation

An over-idealized partner may become selfish, believing that little effort is required to maintain the partne's affections. After a manipulation designed to elicit concern about being under-idealized by one's partner, people exhibited increased "good behavior" toward their partners (Murray, Aloni et al., 2009), presumably reflecting nonconscious efforts to increase the partner's dependence on oneself. Conversely, when people feel over-appreciated, they may decrease good behavior because it takes self-control to behave well (Finkel & Campbell, 2001), and it is clear that the partner already highly values the self.

Threat to the self

Deci and Ryan (2000) posit autonomy as a basic human need. In a meta-analysis of eight samples, perceived autonomy support by a partner was positively associated with relationship satisfaction and commitment (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). Perceived idealization might impinge on one's sense of autonomy by imposing undesired expectations. Self-threat might be especially relevant for perceived over-idealization of abilities because a partner might insist one has a specific skill that one does not see in oneself. Self-threat might also occur for traits, for example, when a partner insists one is more kind than one wants to be.

In addition to feeling that a partner has unwanted expectations, perceived over-idealization might undermine feelings that the partner recognizes and values one's true self. For example, one might fear that the partner will eventually discover that one cannot live up to overly idealized images of the self. In one experiment, participants were led to believe that their partner was likely to discover their "secret self." Low self-esteem individuals feared this discovery would lead to decreased acceptance (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). Self-concealment, a tendency to hide negative information from others (Larson & Chastain, 1990), is associated with decreased satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships (Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012),

presumably because it undermines autonomy needs in relationships and requires constant self-monitoring. Fear of discovery is also related to fear of success. People who feel undeserving of their achieved success often feel like impostors, having lower self-appraisals and also expecting that partners think less of them (Leary, Patton, Orlando, & Wagoner-Funk, 2000). Over-idealized individuals may similarly feel like impostors, anticipating discovery that their true self falls short of their partners' lofty expectations.

Integrating the proposed mechanisms

One proposed mechanism (accommodation behavior) stems from increased feelings of relationship security due to perceived positive regard, while the other proposed mechanism (threat to self) stems from feelings of relationship insecurity due to the perceived inaccuracy of the partner's regard. Thus, people may feel secure and insecure at the same time. The conflict between such opposing feelings may create a sense of ambivalence that is believed to be characteristic of the experience of perceived over-idealization and is one source of predicted decreases in relationship satisfaction. Because of this ambivalence, it is important to examine both of these mediators simultaneously.

Is it better to be seen as real or ideal?

Swann and colleagues argued that people desire self-verification (being seen as they see themselves) because confirmation of one's self-concept is existentially useful (Swann et al., 1992). Swann, de la Ronde, and Hixon (1994) demonstrated that desired levels of idealization depended on relationship stage. Whereas people in dating relationships were more intimate with partners who idealized them, married people were more intimate with partners who viewed them realistically (Swann et al., 1994). This finding suggests that overly high levels of perceived idealization might be problematic among married persons. However, these studies examined linear effects of actual self-other agreement rather than perceived idealization.

Swann's research also demonstrated that dating and married couples have different relationship goals, which may dictate preferences for idealization versus accuracy. Early in relationships, when attraction is essential, the benefits of feeling idealized might be limitless unless the attribute is easily disconfirmable, which may cause anxiety over discovery. In long-term relationships, attraction has lower priority and responsiveness, whereby partners express mutual understanding and validation (Reis et al., 2004), becomes focal. Thus, perceived over-idealization would be problematic (especially for traits) because it violates responsiveness expectations in marriage.

Perceived over-idealization of traits versus abilities

Neff and Karney (2005) demonstrated that to be effective, idealization at the global (abstract) level must be grounded in specific (concrete) accuracy or accurate understanding of a partner's positive and negative attributes. Newlywed wives whose perceptions matched their partner's self-perceived specific qualities provided better support and were less likely to divorce (Neff & Karney, 2005). These findings imply the need to be clear about which aspects of the self are idealized—that is, the pattern of effects may differ

depending on whether one feels over-idealized on traits (typically not very concrete) or abilities (typically fairly concrete). Most work in this area has focused on relatively abstract, global attributes such as traits—for example, "kind and affectionate," "understanding," or "thoughtless" (Murray et al., 1996). Abilities, in contrast, are relatively more concrete, specific attributes that are more easily disconfirmed than traits—for example, "athletic," "sense of humor," or "artistic/musically skilled." In one study that included both traits and abilities (Murray et al., 2000), perceiving that a partner viewed oneself positively on traits and abilities (not controlling for self-views) had similarly positive (linear) effects. Nonetheless, the nonlinear effects of perceived idealization on traits versus abilities are potentially different, especially as a function of relationship stage.

More generally, distinguishing traits and abilities is theoretically important because people may want to convey different qualities to their partners at different relationship stages. Early on, people focus on making good impressions, and confirmation (or disconfirmation) is a major concern, suggesting that only perceived over-idealization of abilities would be problematic. Idealization is an established feature of passionate love (Fisher, 2006), so that inaccurate understanding of traits may be acceptable, given that early stage relationships tend to be high in passionate love. Later in a relationship, expectations for responsiveness are stronger, which requires understanding and validation, suggesting that perceived over-idealization of both traits and abilities may be problematic.

For example, Jane could be uncomfortable if she believes that she lacks the ability to make people laugh, but feels that Bob believes she is hilarious. Jane may worry that Bob will talk about how funny she is to their friends and family or fear that he will stop loving her when he eventually discovers her lack of humorousness. Because abilities are more easily disconfirmed (Neff & Karney, 2005) early in relationships, overly high perceived idealization of abilities may be more uncomfortable than overly high perceived idealization of traits. Perceived idealization of traits may play a weightier role in long-term relationships, when partners know each other well. If Jane considers herself to be moderately extroverted, she may be uneasy thinking that her long-term partner, Bob, believes her to be exceptionally extroverted, because this would highlight his lack of understanding of her self-view.

Contexts of perceived over-idealization

As suggested above, the context in which perceived idealization occurs may shape its operation. Perceived over-idealization may be especially common and potent in early relationship stages when partners are less well-known to each other. Situational perceived over-idealization, in which one becomes momentarily aware of some degree of perceived over-idealization, may be common. Although one incident of feeling over-idealized may not recast stable relationship beliefs, subtle and temporary changes in feelings and resulting behavior may be evident, which may yield more lasting reevaluation if repeated. Thus, effects of situational perceived over-idealization were examined experimentally.

The present research

The present research examined whether there is an optimal level of perceived idealization from a partner, such that extremes lead to decreased relationship well-being as indexed

both behaviorally (Hypothesis 1a) and by explicit measures (Hypothesis 1b). This implies a curvilinear association. Extremes of perceived idealization were also expected to be associated with lower levels of relationship accommodation (Hypothesis 2a) and with greater threat to the self (Hypothesis 2b), the hypothesized mediators. Finally, the research examined whether lack of accommodation and threat to self would explain the detrimental effects of perceived idealization on relationship well-being at extreme levels (Hypothesis 3).

Perceived over-idealization was examined in three relationship contexts. Study 1 used an experimental design in a laboratory setting, allowing us to examine causal direction of perceived over-idealization and to include a nonobvious behavioral outcome measure (to examine the possibility of nonconscious effects). Study 2 was a large questionnaire study of married couples, permitting us to examine the proposed curvilinear effect as well as the relative importance of feeling over-idealized on abilities versus traits. Study 3 examined perceptions of over-idealization in dating relationships, in which stronger findings were expected for abilities. Study 3 also tested the hypothesized mediating mechanisms described above.

Study 1: egregious virtues

Study 1 was a laboratory experiment designed to address three issues: (a) whether perceived over-idealization causally influences relationship quality, (b) whether perceived over-idealization effects can be situational, and (c) whether perceived over-idealization would affect a nonobvious behavioral marker of closeness. Because the experiment involved only a single instance of perceived over-idealization, effects might occur on an implicit behavioral measure but not on explicit ratings (which might only be affected by longer-term perceived idealization).

Method

Participants. Participants were 99 dating couples, recruited through the Psychology subject pool, e-mail advertisements, and flyers. Eight couples were excluded (one for language difficulty, two for suspicion they were not in a relationship, two for reports by control–condition participants that their partner did not write many positive qualities, and three for suspicion about the manipulation). The final sample consisted of 91 couples (90 heterosexual and 1 lesbian) whose mean relationship length was 19.35 months ($SD =$ 13.78, range = 1–61 months). Participants' age ranged from 17 to 36 years ($M = 20.39$, SD = 2.19 years). The largest ethnic group was Caucasian (45.7%), but 28.7% were Asian, 14.6% were African American, and 10.9% reported other categories. Of these ethnic groups, 13.5% reported being Hispanic or Latino.

Procedures. The experiment was advertised as a study on thoughts and feelings in dating relationships. Participants either received one research credit or were paid $5 or $10. The protocol was closely modeled after Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, and Kusche (2002, Study 3) "egregious fault experiment," which used a manipulation intended to make participants think their partners found many faults in them. That experiment was modified by leading one participant to think that his/her partner over-idealized him/her,

but otherwise followed the Murray et al. procedure. Derrick and Murray (2007) used a similar paradigm to test perceived superiority (but not over-idealization).

Couples sat at a long table, one partner seated on the end, the other on the side of the table so that they were perpendicular to each other. A partition prevented them from seeing what the other was writing, yet allowed them to tell if the partner was writing a lot or a little or turning the page. Before beginning, the experimenter instructed participants not to communicate and that they would proceed from one questionnaire to the next only when both had finished. Participants then completed a packet of pretest measures. For couples in the perceived over-idealization condition ($n = 46$), one participant (the target) was randomly assigned to be led to believe that his/her partner was spending an excessive time listing the target's positive qualities. To achieve this, targets received a one-page questionnaire with the following instructions: "Please list all of the qualities of your partner that are extremely valuable and positive. You should not list any more than one such quality if that was all that easily came to mind." Although target participants were led to believe that their partner received the identical questionnaire, in reality, partners received a one-page questionnaire with the following instructions: "Please list as many of the items in your dormitory room, bedroom, or apartment as possible (and a minimum of 30 items)." In order to reach 30 items, participants had to flip the page over and continue writing on the back of the page; this was done to ensure that targets would notice how much their partner was writing. To further strengthen the believability of the manipulation, each packet was color-coded and both partners always received the same color questionnaire.

As expected, targets typically finished first and had to wait for their partner to finish. The experimenter timed participants so that if partners did not stop naturally, they were interrupted after 5 minutes. Couples ($n = 45$) randomly assigned to the control condition were both given the positive qualities questionnaire. Thus, both partners in the control condition almost always finished at about the same time (and thus would have no reason to believe that their partner over-idealized them). Following the manipulation, all participants completed the posttest satisfaction questionnaire and a manipulation check. Finally, they were probed for suspicion and debriefed.

Manipulation check. Four items adapted from Murray et al. (2002) asked participants whether their partner listed more or fewer positive qualities than they expected ($1 = a\ lot$ *less than expected*, $4 = $ *about the number expected*, $7 = $ *a lot more than expected*), wrote more or less quickly than expected ($1 = $ *a lot less quickly than expected*, $7 = $ *a lot more quickly than expected*), the number of qualities they guessed their partner had listed, and how concerned they were that their partner was writing about their positive qualities ($1 = $ *not at all concerned*, $7 = $ *extremely concerned*). Due to low inter-item correlations, the items were considered separately.

Behavioral measure. When couples arrived in the laboratory, the experimenter directed them to a couch covered with a striped blanket. While the main experimenter explained the study and obtained consent, a second experimenter surreptitiously recorded the number of stripes visible between partners. After the experiment, before the debriefing, the main experimenter again directed the couple to sit on the couch and the same second

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for Study 1 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Pretest satisfaction	5.54	.83			
2. Posttest satisfaction	55.49	7.33	.67**		
3. Pretest implicit closeness	16.83	12.22	−.15	−.08	
4. Posttest implicit closeness	17.32	19.62	.04	−.08	.38**

**p < .01 (all two-tailed).

experimenter again recorded the number of stripes between them. These numbers served as a nonobvious measure of closeness. Each stripe was 5.87 centimeters wide; the number of stripes was converted to centimeters.

Self-report measures. At pretest, participants completed the eight-item Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988); one item was removed due to low reliability (a for remaining 7 items = .77). At posttest, participants completed the 11-item Marital Opinion Scale (MOS; Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986) of relationship satisfaction (a = .93).

Results

Analysis strategy. The key comparison contrasts target participants in the perceived over-idealization condition to those in the control condition. Because both control–condition partners wrote about their partner's positive qualities, the average of their responses was used for all measures. Thus, each test reported below compares over-idealized participants to the average of partners in the control condition. Note that using control–couple averages is likely to be conservative in that it reduces the overall N; it also resolves issues of nonindependence that would arise if they were considered separately. Using a single couple score is comparable to the behavioral measure, which has only one value per couple.[1] See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.

Manipulation checks. Compared to control–condition participants, experimental condition targets thought that their partner listed more qualities than expected, $t(67.92) = 3.90$, $p <$ .01, $d = .85$; $Ms = 5.57$ and 4.59, $SDs = 1.40$ and .87, respectively, guessed that their partner had written significantly more positive qualities, $t(53.48) = 5.96$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.33$; $Ms = 23.61$ and 11.19, $SDs = 12.33$ and 5.35, and reported that their partners were writing more quickly than expected, $t(78) = 2.31$, $p < .05$, $d = .52$; $Ms = 4.76$ and 4.19, $SDs = 1.24$ and .97. There was no significant difference for ratings of conscious concern ($p = .48$).

Dependent measures. Analyses of covariance were conducted with condition as the independent variable, posttest score as the dependent variable, and pretest scores as a covariate. Because the analysis used couple means in the control condition, gender was not included as a factor. However, to check for gender effects, all analyses were executed using individuals as the unit of analysis; there were no main effects or interactions with gender.[2] See Table 1 for descriptive statistics.
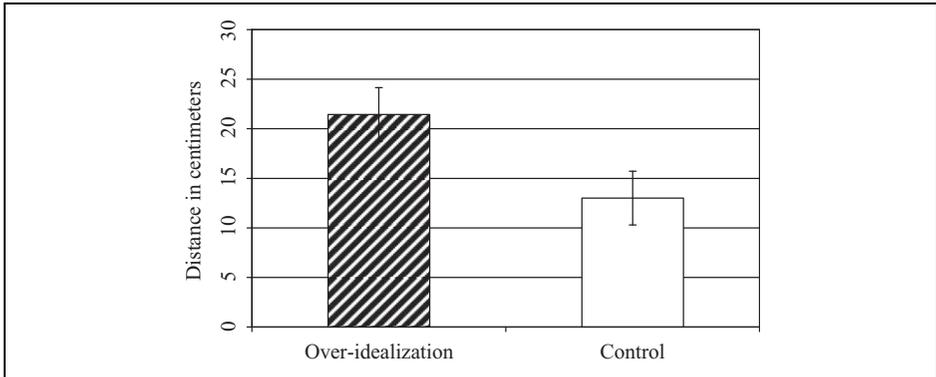
Figure 1. Effect of Study 1 experimental manipulation on behavioral closeness.

There was a significant effect of condition on behavioral closeness, $F(1,87) = 4.94$, $p < .05$, *partial r* = .23. As shown in Figure 1, after the task, those in the perceived over-idealization condition sat farther from their partners ($M = 21.44$) compared to controls ($M = 13.00$; Mean Difference = 8.44).[3] These results support Hypothesis 1a. In contrast, the effect of perceived over-idealization on self-reported satisfaction was not significant, $F(1,88) = .70$, $p = .41$, *partial r* = .09). These results do not support Hypothesis 1b.

Discussion of Study 1

Inducing perceived over-idealization led relationship partners to physically distance themselves from each other, while an explicit measure was not significantly affected. These results support Hypothesis 1a, that at extreme levels perceived idealization would lead to decreases in a behavioral marker of relationship well-being, but not Hypothesis 1b, which posited decreases on explicit measures of relationship well-being. Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (2000), in their egregious fault study, did show changes on an explicit measure, but it is possible that the experience of a partner listing one's negative qualities would have stronger, more obvious effects than the manipulation of positive qualities used here. Results may have been stronger with the explicit measure if participants had described feelings about the relationship *at that moment*, as opposed to the more general measure of relationship satisfaction that they completed.[4] In the immediate aftermath of inducing perceived idealization, perhaps before an over-idealized partner has had an opportunity to consciously consider the implications of his or her pedestal, the seeds of threat to the self may have begun to take root, thereby subtly influencing behavior outside of awareness. Implicit feelings of closeness may be more sensitive to situational perceived idealization than explicit feelings. Future research should explore this issue further using additional implicit and explicit measures.

Alternative explanations. One alternative explanation for these results is that participants in the experimental condition may have felt bad for not listing as many positive qualities as their partner seemed to be writing. To examine this possibility, changes in self-

perceptions from the beginning to the end of the experiment were examined, using posttest items that represent "feeling like a good person" (kind and affectionate, tolerant and accepting, critical and judgmental (reversed), and thoughtless (reversed)). The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed on posttest self-perceptions, with pretest self-esteem as the covariate. There was no significant effect of condition, $F(1,62) = .66$, $p = .42$, suggesting that the effect of the manipulation was not due to feeling like a bad person. It is also possible that target partners may have felt annoyed or awkward that their partner was taking so long to complete their questionnaire. This possibility cannot be ruled out.

Study 2: perceived over-idealization in marriage

Study 2 examined the relation of perceived idealization to satisfaction in a sample of married couples. This analysis was made possible through a data set collected for other purposes (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Study 3) that included self-ratings and perceived partner ratings for both abilities and traits.

Method

Participants. A total of 89 heterosexual married couples (178 individuals) from an urban/suburban location in Western New York were recruited through community advertisements. Couples were compensated $60 for participation. On average, husbands were 39.3 (range = 23–73) and wives were 37.2 years old (range = 21–69). Couples had been married an average of 10.3 years (range ≤1–50 years). The sample was predominately non-Hispanic and White (91%).

Procedure. Spouses independently completed questionnaires in the laboratory assessing relationship quality, ratings of self-attributes, and perceived partner ratings of self-attributes.

Self and perceived partner ratings. Participants rated themselves on five ability items from the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ, a = .74 for wives, .60 for husbands; Pelham & Swann, 1989). The items were "socially skilled," "physically attractive," "athletic," "artistically/musically skilled," and "intelligent." Participants also rated themselves on 18 positive and negative (reverse-scored) traits from the Interpersonal Qualities Scale (IQS, a = .84 for wives, .82 for husbands; Murray et al., 1996), using a none-point scale from *not at all characteristic* to *completely characteristic*. Sample items include "kind and affectionate," "patient," "lazy," and "moody." Participants were also asked to imagine how their spouse would evaluate them on the same SAQ and IQS items along the same nine-point scale (IQS, a = .82 for wives, .85 for husbands; SAQ, .67 for wives, .69 for husbands). Perceived idealization for abilities was computed as perceived partner-SAQ minus self-SAQ; for traits, perceived partner-IQS minus self-IQS.[5]

Marital satisfaction measure. Marital satisfaction was assessed with the five-item Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983). Participants rated general feelings about their

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for Study 2 variables.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Husband centered perceived idealization of traits	.00	.68					
2. Husband centered perceived idealization of abilities	.00	1.03	.55**				
3. Husband marital satisfaction	6.11	.88	.46**	.22[†]			
4. Wife centered perceived idealization of traits	.00	.61	.40**	.32**	.40**		
5. Wife centered perceived idealization of abilities	.00	.96	.25**	.13	.42**	.63**	
6. Wife marital satisfaction	6.19	.74	.31**	.31**	.51**	.38**	.26*

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$, [†]$p = .06$ level (all two-tailed).

marriage on a seven-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* through *strongly agree* (husbands a $=$ .91; wives, .95).

Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics. Because the analysis focuses on curvilinearity, it was necessary to ensure that extreme scores did not drive the effects. As Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) state, "Polynomial equations may be highly unstable and can be grossly affected by individual outliers." (p. 212). Thus, outliers more than three standard deviations (*SD*) above or below the mean were eliminated (retaining participants' other data points). Additionally, an examination of scatterplots allowed for the removal of bivariate outliers. For each variable, the number of outliers removed ranged from zero to three.

To account for dependencies in husbands' and wives' reports, multilevel modeling (SPSS MIXED) was used to test linear and curvilinear associations between perceived idealization and satisfaction. Two Actor–Partner Interdependence Models (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) estimated standardized actor and partner effects of linear perceived idealization (the partner-minus-self difference score for abilities or traits) and squared perceived idealization (see Table 3). An *actor effect* represents the relationship between each person's linear or curvilinear perceived idealization and his/her own marital satisfaction; a *partner effect*, the relationship between each person's linear or curvilinear perceived idealization and his/her partner's marital satisfaction.

As Figure 2 shows, for husbands, there were actor effects of curvilinear perceived idealization predicting satisfaction for both abilities and traits. For wives, the actor effect of curvilinear perceived idealization of traits was marginally significant, while the actor effect of curvilinear perceived idealization of abilities was nonsignificant. These results partially support Hypothesis 1b, that perceived idealization would have curvilinear associations with explicit measures of relationship well-being. The negative betas for the curvilinear effects indicate that relationship satisfaction increases to a point, then levels off and decreases. Following Cohen et al. (2003) maximum values for each significant or marginally significant curvilinear effect were calculated. The maximum values for traits were approximately one-half *SD* above the mean for perceived idealization of traits (maxima for husbands $=$ .27 and for wives $=$ .12). The maximum value for abilities was about 1.5 *SD*s above the mean (maximum $=$ 1.83 for husbands). This suggests that husbands were much more comfortable with idealization of their abilities

Table 3. Actor–partner interdependence model standardized estimates of fixed effects of perceived idealization predicting marital satisfaction for Study 2.

	Husbands			Wives		
	β	t	P value	β	t	P value
Perceived idealization of traits						
Linear actor	.08	.71	.48	.09	1.06	.29
Quadratic actor	−.27	−2.61	<.01	−.19	−1.91	.06
Linear partner	.10	1.00	.32	.09	.95	.34
Quadratic partner	−.17	−1.52	.13	−.03	−.36	.72
Perceived idealization of abilities						
Linear actor	.48	3.46	<.01	.11	.76	.45
Quadratic actor	−.35	−3.03	<.01	−.09	−.49	.63
Linear partner	.30	1.73	.09	.32	2.68	<.01
Quadratic partner	−.16	−.71	.48	−.14	−1.41	.16

compared to idealization of their traits. There were no significant curvilinear partner effects, but linear perceived idealization of abilities was positively associated with partners' marital satisfaction for both spouses.

Custom hypothesis tests were executed (following procedures from Kenny et al., 2006) to examine interactions of each linear and curvilinear actor and partner effect with gender by creating contrast estimates for each main effect and interaction with gender. There were no significant interactions of any actor or partner effect with gender for traits or abilities, indicating that the actor and partner effects were not moderated by gender.

Brief discussion of Study 2

Study 2 supported the proposed curvilinear effect of feeling over-idealized. There was a negative association with satisfaction when husbands felt that either their abilities or traits were being over-idealized at relatively high levels. These results suggest that it is beneficial to feel somewhat idealized by a partner, but that idealization becomes detrimental beyond a point. Though there were not statistically significant gender differences, the curvilinear effects were especially strong for husbands, while the actor effect for perceived idealization of traits was only marginally significant and for abilities was not close to significant for wives. Future research might test for gender differences in a larger sample. These results provide partial support for Hypothesis 1b.

As argued above, perceived over-idealization of traits may carry more uniformly positive associations in dating relationships. Study 3 examined this hypothesis and also investigated proposed mechanisms for the effects of perceived idealization.

Study 3: perceived over-idealization in dating relationships

Method

Participants. Participants were 153 college students (110 women) with a mean age of 19.19 years ($SD = 1.99$) currently involved in a romantic relationship (mean length =
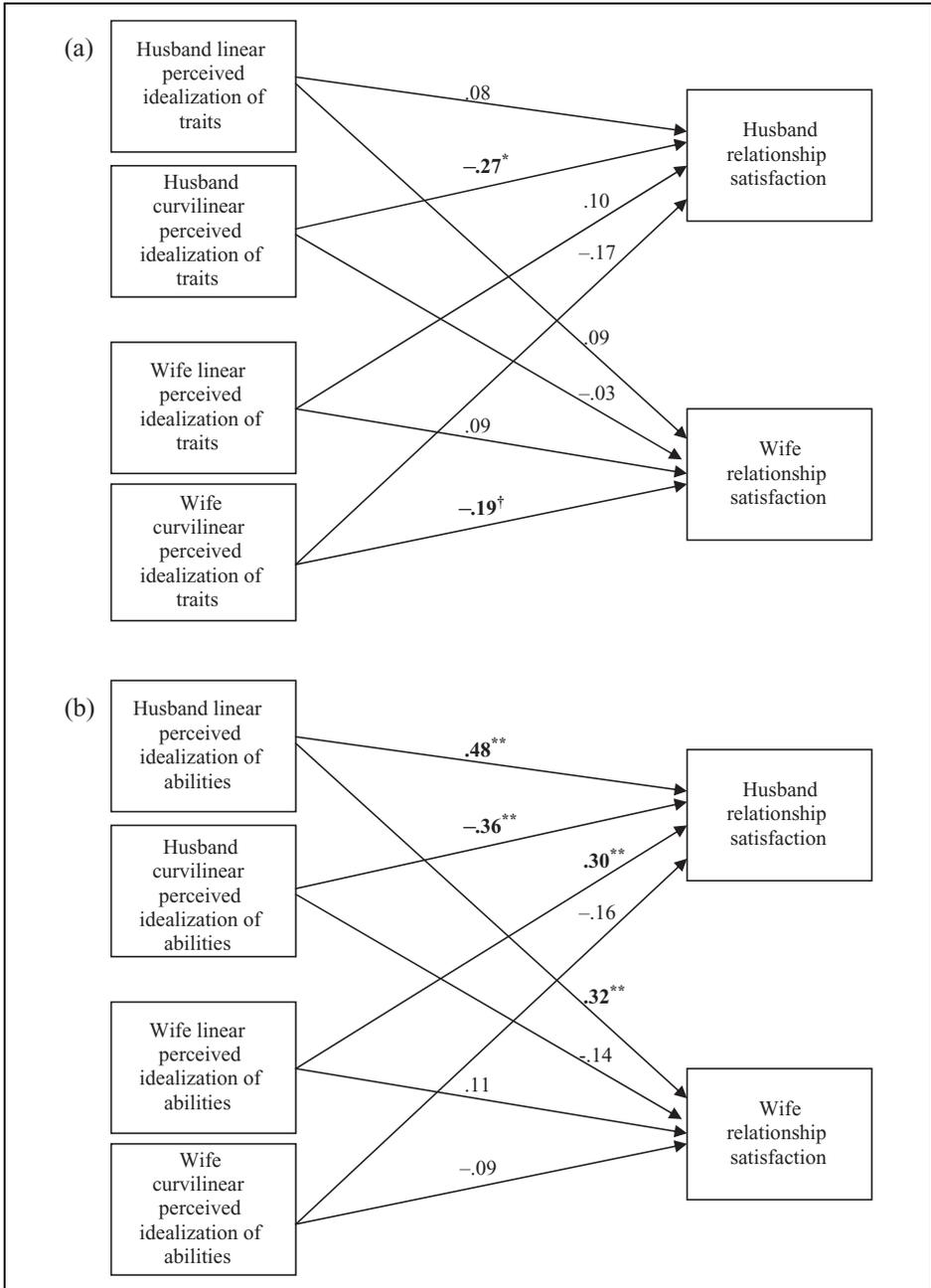
Figure 2. Standardized actor and partner effects of linear and curvilinear perceived idealization of (a) traits and (b) abilities on relationship satisfaction. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$ (Study 2).

20.24 months; $SD = 19.33$ months, range $= 1$ month–8.5 years). Thirteen reported casual dating, 130 were in a committed relationship, and 10 were engaged. The sample was ethnically diverse: 39% Caucasian, 26% East Asian, 10.4% Hispanic or Latino, 8.4% South East Asian, 5.8% African American, 4.5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 5.8% Other/Mixed.

Procedure. Data were collected in one of two online mass testing sessions. Due to length restrictions, during the second testing session, some questionnaires were shortened. Items included in the second session were based on the highest loadings from the first testing session. Mean scale scores were computed using all available items for each participant.

Perceived idealization. Participants first rated their own abilities and traits. A four-item version of the SAQ ($\alpha = .79$; Pelham & Swann, 1989) assessed abilities including "leadership ability," "common sense," "emotional stability," and "sense of humor." Participants rated how well each attribute described themselves relative to others their own age on a 10-point scale (ranging from bottom 5% to upper 5%). For traits, participants rated how well 21 positive and negative (reverse-scored) trait attributes from the IQS ($\alpha = .76$; Murray et al., 1996) described themselves on a seven-point scale ($1 = not$ *at all characteristic*, $7 = completely characteristic$). After rating themselves, participants completed the same two scales for their perceptions of their partner's views of themselves (abilities $\alpha = .72$; traits $\alpha = .85$). As in Study 2, perceived idealization was computed using difference scores.[5]

Relationship satisfaction. The MOS assessed satisfaction over the past 2 months. Responses were summed so that scores could range from 11 to 67 ($\alpha = .94$). Due to an error in the first testing session, data were lost for items 1–10 for 77 participants. For these participants, MOS item 11 (a global item) was used as the index of relationship satisfaction. A *z*-score was created to combine data for those 77 participants with a *z*-score of the composite scale for participants in the second session. To ensure that the different number of items did not influence findings, all analyses were tested using MOS item 11 only, and all significant results remained.

Lack of accommodation. The 16-item measure of accommodation (Rusbult et al., 1991) asked participants how frequently they engage in various problem-solving behaviors on a scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 7 (*constantly*); $\alpha = .83$. Positive items were reverse scored to create a "lack of accommodation" scale score. During the second mass testing session, 8 of the 16 items were administered ($\alpha = .79$).

Threat to self. To measure threat to self, a five-item measure assessing autonomy threat, or how much independence people give up for their relationship ($\alpha = .86$; Murray, Holmes, et al., 2009), was combined with an eight-item measure of fear of discovery ($\alpha = .94$). Some items were adapted from the self-concealment scale (Larson & Chastain, 1990), such as: "If my partner knew the 'real me' he or she might not want to be with me" and "If I shared my faults with my partner, my partner might like me less."

Table 4. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for study 3 variables.

	M	SD	I	2	3	4
I. Centered perceived idealization of traits	.00	.60				
2. Centered perceived idealization of abilities	.00	.75	.37**			
3. Relationship satisfaction composite	−.06	.98	.32**	.11		
4. Lack of accommodation	2.20	1.09	−.29**	−.09	−.50**	
5. Threat to self	2.74	1.16	−.18*	−.11	−.41**	.51**

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$ (all two-tailed).

During the second mass testing session, four of the eight fear of discovery items were administered ($\alpha = .95$ for those four items). Both measures used a scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly). Because these two scales are conceptually related, to simplify results, they were combined into a variable called "threat to self" (overall $\alpha = .90$). The hypothesized curvilinear and mediation effects were significant when the two scales were tested separately.

Results

As in Study 2, outliers more than three SDs from the mean were removed. For each variable, the number of outliers deleted ranged from zero to four cases. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics.

Hypothesis 1b: Tests for linear and curvilinear associations with perceived idealization.

Standard hierarchical polynomial regression (Cohen et al., 2003) was used to test for linear and curvilinear associations between perceived idealization and relationship outcomes. Centered perceived idealization (the partner-minus-self difference score for abilities or traits) was entered first, followed by centered squared perceived idealization. Linear and quadratic effects for Study 3 analyses are shown in Table 5. For traits, there were significant and strong positive linear and curvilinear associations with accommodation, but only the linear term was significant for satisfaction and threat to self. For abilities, however, there were significant linear and curvilinear associations with satisfaction and with both mechanism variables, supporting Hypotheses 1b, 2a, and 2b. There were no significant interactions with gender.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1b, as illustrated in Figure 3a, relationship satisfaction increased with perceived idealization of abilities up to a point (approximately one-half SD above the zero point, the point that represents equal levels of perceived partner regard and self-regard), then leveled off and decreased sharply at high levels, where perceived partner regard is much greater than self-regard.[6] The maximum raw difference score was .24, which represents the degree of perceived idealization that promotes optimal levels of satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Curvilinear relation of perceived idealization-abilities with hypothesized mechanisms.

Table 5. Polynomial regression results for study 3.

	Perceived idealization of traits			Perceived idealization of abilities		
	Increment	F_{change}	β	Increment	F_{change}	β
Satisfaction						
Linear	.10	$F(1,150) = 17.43$	.32**	.01	$F(1,63) = .70$	.11
Quadratic	.00	$F(1,149) = .44$	.05	.10	$F(1,62) = 6.62$	−.31*
Lack of accommodation						
Linear	.09	$F(1,154) = 4.32$	−.29**	.01	$F(1,67) = .54$	−.09
Quadratic	.05	$F(1,153) = .07$	.22**	.19	$F(1,66) = 5.43$	.44**
Threat to self						
Linear	.03	$F(1,154) = .95$	−.18*	.01	$F(1,67) = .79$	−.11
Quadratic	.01	$F(1,153) = .21$	.12	.19	$F(1,66) = 15.35$	.44**

Note: Quadratic betas control for the linear effect.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

As shown in Table 5, there was a significant curvilinear association between perceived idealization of abilities and lack of accommodation (see Figure 3b, optimal raw difference score = .24). As predicted, there was also a significant curvilinear relationship for threat to self (see Figure 3c, optimal raw difference score = .27). Examination of these patterns revealed a U-shaped pattern such that at low and high perceived idealization of abilities, lack of accommodation and threat to self were high while at moderate levels of perceived idealization, levels of lack of accommodation and threat to self were low. These results support Hypotheses 2a and 2b.

Hypothesis 3: Multiple mediator model.

To test Hypothesis 3, a bootstrapping approach was used to assess the indirect effects simultaneously (Preacher & Hayes, 2004, 2008; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Specifically, the predicted mechanisms—lack of accommodation and threat to self—were tested as mediators of the curvilinear relationship between partner idealization of abilities and relationship satisfaction (using 5000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals). As Figure 4 displays, when the mediators are included in the model, the effect of perceived idealization on satisfaction becomes nonsignificant ($b = −.04$, standard error (SE) = 0.102, t (64) = $−0.42, p = .68$). These results support Hypothesis 3. The overall indirect effect was strong ($ab = −.264$, $SE = 0.073$, 95% confidence interval (CI): (−0.401, −0.137)) and lack of accommodation ($ab = −.163$, $SE = 0.073$, 95% CI: (−0.322, −0.046)) had a significant unique indirect association, while the unique indirect association for threat to self ($ab = −.101$, $SE = 0.073$, 95% CI: (−0.299, 0.001)) was only marginally significant when accommodation was included in the model.[7]

General discussion

Three studies showed consistent support for the idea that too much perceived idealization from a romantic partner can be detrimental to romantic relationships. Previous
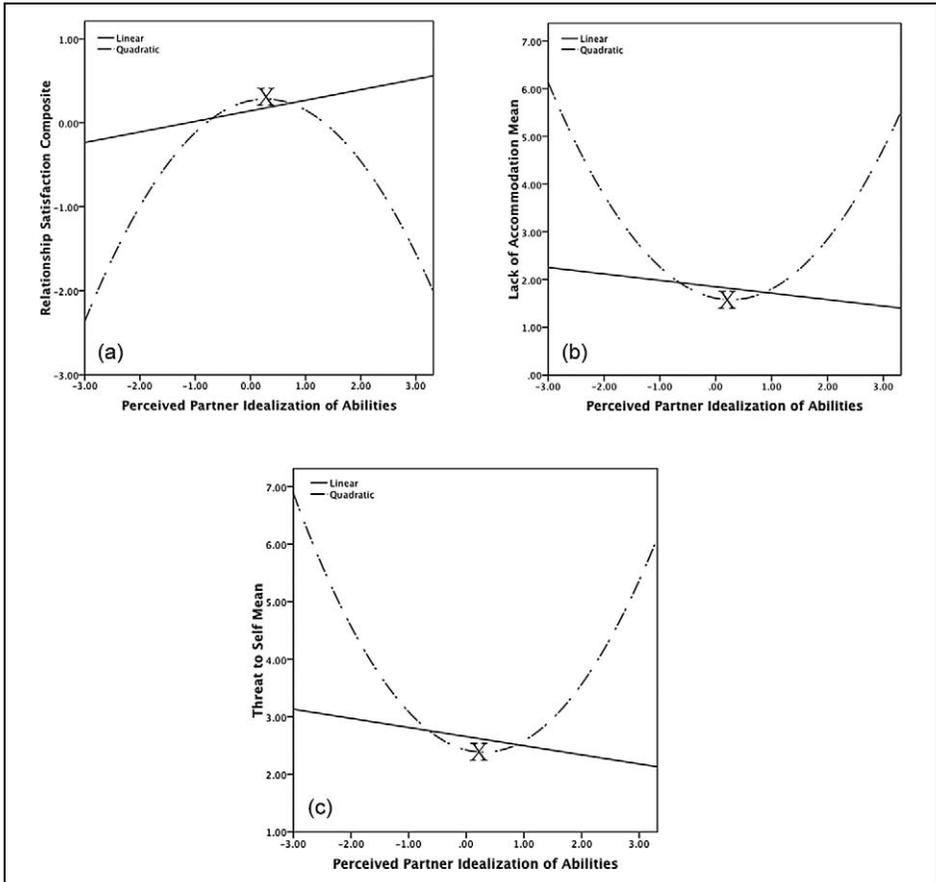
Figure 3. Regression lines for predicted values (based on equations from hierarchical polynomial regression) generated using SPSS curve estimation procedure for centered linear and quadratic associations of perceived idealization of abilities on (a) satisfaction, (b) accommodation, and (c) threat to self. Note that the linear association does not control for the quadratic association, but the quadratic association does control for the linear association. Inflection points are labeled with an "X" (Study 3).

research has focused on actual partner idealization and none has examined possible curvilinear effects. In addition, two theoretically derived mediators, lack of accommodation and threat to self, were shown to help explain the detrimental effects of perceived over-idealization. Results suggest conceptually meaningful differences between perceived over-idealization of more versus less concrete (abilities vs. traits) characteristics in the different contexts of short versus long-term relationships.

Study 1 found that individuals induced to feel over-idealized physically distanced themselves from their partners but did not show change on an explicit self-report measure. These results supported Hypothesis 1a that perceived idealization would lead to decreased relationship well-being as indexed by behavioral measures, but not
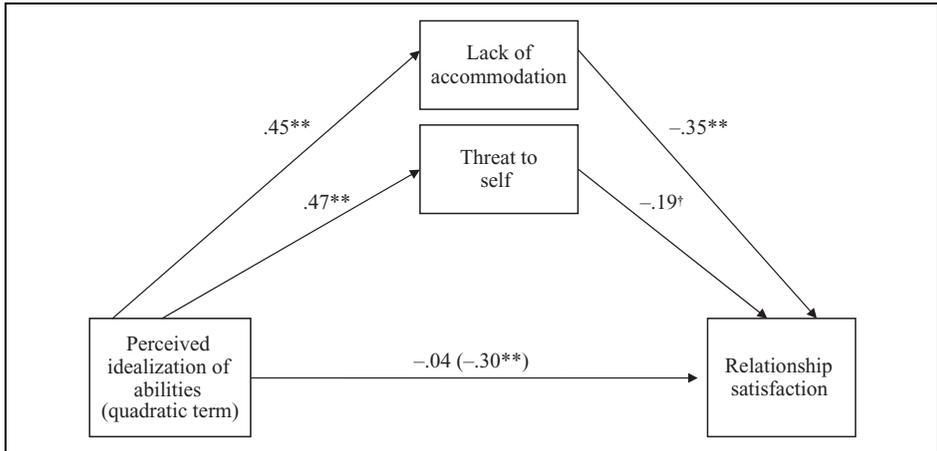
Figure 4. Simultaneous mediation model testing mediation of the curvilinear term of perceived idealization on satisfaction by accommodation and threat to self (Study 3).

Hypothesis 1b, which predicted similar results with explicit measures of relationship well-being. Because Study 1 was an experiment, it supports causal interpretation of the effect of perceived over-idealization on relationship outcomes. Moreover, because this effect emerged solely on the nonobvious behavioral measure, it suggests that perceived over-idealization might not be consciously experienced (or not experienced in a negative way) when it is transitory. Perhaps perceived over-idealization must occur repeatedly for the effect to be felt consciously.

In Study 2, perceived idealization of both abilities and traits among married couples had significant curvilinear effects on satisfaction for husbands and perceived idealization of traits had a marginally significant curvilinear effect on satisfaction for wives, providing partial support for Hypothesis 1b. Study 3 found that in dating relationships, perceived idealization of abilities (but not of traits) revealed the predicted curvilinear association with all dependent variables, supporting Hypotheses 1b, 2a, and 2b. Mediation analyses showed that the combined effect of lack of accommodation and feeling a threat to the self may explain the detrimental effects of feeling over-idealized, providing partial support for Hypothesis 3. Both proposed mediators were significantly related to perceived idealization, and both yielded significant indirect effects, although the effect for lack of accommodation was significant whereas the effect for threat to self was only marginally significant. The two mediators were strongly correlated ($r = .51, p < .001$), so it is possible that shared variance across the two constructs might explain the relatively weaker effect for the latter.

In Studies 2 and 3, perceived idealization of abilities had positive effects up to a point but negative effects at moderately high levels. Perceived idealization of traits had uniformly positive effects among dating individuals, but negative effects at moderately high levels among married individuals (especially husbands). These studies indicate that slight to moderate perceptions of partner idealization may be optimal and that perceived over-idealization may harm relationships. In married couples, there is an optimal level of

feeling idealized by a partner on traits (with husbands also showing a curvilinear effect for abilities), whereas for dating couples, a similar effect emerged for abilities, but the benefit of feeling idealized appears unlimited insofar as traits are concerned. Interestingly, the inflection point was approximately one-half *SD* above the mean on perceived idealization of traits in the married sample and on perceived idealization of abilities in the dating sample, suggesting that an optimal level of perceived idealization occurs when a partner is perceived to view oneself slightly more positively than one sees oneself. The inflection point was higher for perceived idealization of abilities in husbands, which indicates somewhat greater tolerance for perceived idealization of abilities.

In both dating and married samples (for husbands), results indicate that feeling one's abilities were over-idealized by a partner was associated with lower relationship satisfaction. Rather than being flattering, the experience of perceived over-idealization of abilities may be associated with negative processes, including lesser willingness to accommodate the partner's needs, and possibly greater feelings of threat to personal autonomy.

Our findings that the effect of perceived idealization of traits varies in dating and married couples dovetail with previous research suggesting that being trait-idealized may be a good thing in dating relationships, when the primary goal is to attract a mate (Swann et al., 1994). Dating partners might not feel threatened if they believe that their partners think of them as more extroverted or kinder than they really are. In fact, feeling idealized may even encourage behavior that maintains the idealized view. However, in marriage, trait idealization may become uncomfortable as self-verification goals gain importance. Once a relationship has been established, it becomes important to feel that a partner understands and appreciates oneself, fostering a sense of epistemic coherence (Stinson et al., 2010). Thus, over-idealizing partners may violate norms of responsiveness within close relationships, suggesting that they do not understand or value one's true self (Reis et al., 2004).

Study 3 supported Hypothesis 3, which is lack of accommodative behavior and threat to self are key mechanisms behind detrimental effects of feeling over-idealized on abilities. However, as noted in footnote 4, measures of lack of accommodation and threat to self were included in Study 1, and significant effects of the over-idealization manipulation were not found. It is possible that a single instance of over-idealization may not be sufficient to create changes on explicit measures or that the lack of temporal specificity in the questionnaire items influenced these results. Future research should seek to replicate these results. Feeling ''put on a pedestal'' may lead one to become relatively self-centered and thoughtless, seeing less need to put a partner's needs ahead of one's own or to make sacrifices to please a partner. Whereas the lack of accommodation mechanism seems to suggest that over-idealized partners experience reduced pressure to expend energy maintaining the relationship, the threat to self mechanism suggests the opposite—that the pedestal creates added pressure for the over-idealized partner. Common to both explanations is the notion that an over-idealized person must meet a partner's standards, even if those expectations are unwanted or unrealistic. Feelings of threat to self are likely to impinge on one's sense of self and one's sense of freedom, potentially fostering resentment and undermining motivation to promote the relationship (Patrick et al., 2007). Threats to self may additionally create stress and anxiety about being unable

to fulfill such lofty expectations, fostering the wish to self-conceal in order to suppress possible discovery of this discordance. Self-concealment undermines responsiveness, need satisfaction, and relationship well-being (Reis et al., 2004; Uysal, Lin, & Knee, 2010). Issues of relative power and dependence on the relationship are likely at work here. Future research should explicitly test the effect of perceived idealization on power and feelings of dependence in relationships.

Together, these studies indicate that feeling put on a pedestal may create uncomfortable expectations. Within romantic relationships, it may be essential to feel that a partner gets the facts right about one's core self. These results imply that an over-idealizing partner may be perceived as violating a fundamental component of responsiveness in what is typically an adult's most important communal relationship (Reis et al., 2004). Thus, this research builds on and deepens our knowledge about a key and central theme in relationships research—the importance of feeling understood, yet still appreciated. In addition, this work begins to explain how over-idealization may operate. It is also consistent with the recent argument that "positive" processess must be considered in context and that "too much of a good thing" may be detrimental (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). Processes traditionally labeled as positive may be beneficial in healthy relationships, but harmful if they reflect a disconnect from reality, or a lack of understanding.

Limitations

A limitation of Study 1 was that the experimental task did not control whether participants should write about abilities or traits. Because these were dating couples, abilities should have been more relevant than traits. Future research might manipulate perceived over-idealization of traits versus abilities. In addition, to provide better control in the manipulation, future studies might ensure that the perceived idealizer be seated first to ensure that the target participant is responsible for any distancing. It would also be useful to include measures of momentary feelings and items to assess whether or not the target participant was annoyed with the partner. Findings from Studies 1 and 3 are limited to American college students, and it is possible that the findings would differ in older, more representative samples of daters. It is also possible that the results of all three studies might differ in other cultural or social class contexts. For example, the effects of perceived over-idealization might be even stronger in East Asian cultures, where modesty is encouraged. Nonetheless, the findings reported here provide a first step in understanding the processes associated with perceived over-idealization.

Future directions

One potentially interesting direction would consider the effects of perceived over-idealization in other types of relationships; for example, parent–child, teacher–student, or manager–employee relationships. The current research showed that perceived over-idealization occurs in both dating and married relationships, but future work should explore the mediating mechanisms in marriage. Accommodation and threat to self are expected to remain important in more committed relationships, though lack of accommodation may play a bigger role in more committed relationships. It is also possible that

if perceived over-idealization does not threaten the self, it may not be harmful (and it may be possible to identify contextual moderators). Future research should take additional steps toward a functional analysis of why being idealized is problematic. Additionally, research that manipulates the mechanisms experimentally would further validate the correlational results of Study 3. Finally, with additional replications and extensions, this research might be applied in couples therapy to help partners adopt more realistic views of each other's abilities. Therapists might help couple members keep idealization to a slight-to-moderate level, which would communicate positive regard without creating undesired expectations or fears of discovery. With cautious idealization, partners can help each other attain desired goals (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009), effectively encouraging growth in line with the self-concept and avoiding threats to the self or unrealistic or undesired expectations.

Conclusion

The present research advances knowledge in several ways: It suggests an optimal level of what would normally be considered a universally positive process, using diverse samples and experimental evidence. It highlights the impact of perceptions of a partner's beliefs and provides preliminary evidence for two mechanisms that help explain the apparent detrimental effects of perceived over-idealization on satisfaction. Finally, this research highlights the value of considering nonlinear associations in relationship research.

Although feeling positively regarded is generally beneficial, too much of a good thing can undermine relationships, especially longer-term relationships. As Gloria Steinem noted, being put on a pedestal might be uncomfortable because it creates a small space in which to exist.

Notes

1. One possible concern is that couple averages might have less variance than individual scores in the experimental condition. Thus, variance differences between conditions, which might suggest violation of assumptions, were checked in every analysis. In no case was there a problem. Also, the analysis strategy meant that participants listing items in their dorm rooms were not included in the analyses, as they would not be comparable.
2. We also examined whether relationship length, self-esteem, and attachment anxiety moderated reactions to the manipulation. There were no significant interactions for any variables. Including these variables as additional covariates did not change any results.

3. A similar analysis was conducted using a 2 (condition) × 2 (change in pretest to posttest closeness) mixed repeated measures analysis of variance. The analysis yielded the predicted two-way interaction of condition × change in closeness; $F(1,88) = 5.61$, $p < .05$. A simple effects test revealed that within the over-idealization condition, there was a marginally significant increase in distance from pretest to posttest ($Ms = 15.84$ and 20.81 cm; Mean difference = 4.97; $F(1, 88) = 3.37$, $p = .07$). Within the control condition, there was not a significant change in distance from pretest to posttest ($Ms = 17.89$ and 13.68 cm, Mean difference = -4.21; $F(1,88) = 2.30$, $p = .13$). The ANCOVA results were selected because the focus of the study is not on change, but on posttest behavior. Adjustment for pretest closeness is only to the extent that it correlates with posttest.

4. Variables measuring accommodation, threat to self, and responsiveness were included as dependent measures, but did not reveal effects, perhaps due to similar lack of temporal specificity.

5. All analyses were repeated using standardized residuals of self-score predicted from perceived partner-score. In every case for a focal analysis (all curvilinear analyses for abilities and traits, including all mediation analyses for curvilinear effects), results significant using difference scores were also significant using residuals. This was true in both Study 2 and Study 3. Difference scores are reported because they have more intuitively clear meaning. Results using residuals are available from the first author.

6. Relationship length, self-esteem, and attachment anxiety were considered as moderators. There was only one significant interaction with the curvilinear term. Self-esteem interacted with the curvilinear term of perceived idealization of abilities on relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .44$, p < .05). Examination showed that the curvilinear effect was driven by low self-esteem individuals.

7. To test for the relative difference between the two indirect effects, we tested a Structural Equation Model with the paths from lack of accommodation to relationship satisfaction and threat to self to relationship satisfaction fixed to be equal. The difference between the chi-square values for the unconstrained model and the constrained model was 2.11, which indicates that the magnitude of the association of each mediator with relationship satisfaction was not significantly different.

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