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PREPARING FOR THE WORST: DEFENSIVE PESSIMISM IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Tiona Žužul
Harvard Business School,
Cambridge, MA, U.S.A.
tzuzul@hbs.edu

Abstract

Extensive research supports the notion that *defensive pessimism*, a strategy which involves setting low expectations in risky situations in order to prepare for failure, is a beneficial and adaptive form of pessimism. However, there is also evidence indicating that defensive pessimism may not be adaptive in all areas, particularly that of romantic relationships. A longitudinal field study of undergraduates involved in romantic relationships (n = 227) demonstrates that defensive pessimism is indeed *not* beneficial in this domain. Defensive pessimism does not appear to protect the individual following relationship dissolution: results of the present study indicate that defensively pessimistic participants feel no better than optimists directly after a break-up. Indeed, defensive pessimism appears to slow the process of recovery from a break-up: results suggest that optimists may recover from a breakup at a faster pace than defensive pessimists. Defensive pessimism also appears to have negative consequences *during* a relationship: results show that defensively pessimistic participants are less satisfied with their partners as well as their relationships than optimists, and may experience higher rates of relationship dissolution. Finally, defensive pessimism may come with an additional cost, since defensively pessimistic participants show lower life-satisfaction than optimists. These data are interpreted as evidence that, while it may be useful in other types of risky situations, defensive pessimism is a maladaptive strategy in the domain of romantic relationships.

Key words: defensive pessimism, optimism, romantic relationships, break-up

INTRODUCTION

Defensive pessimism - a coping strategy used by certain individuals that involves setting negative expectations for the outcomes of important situations – has recently been identified as a 'good' or adaptive form of pessimism. Indeed, a range of lab studies have demonstrated that people who expect the worst *do not* underperform relative to their optimistic counterparts. Expecting to receive a bad grade

on an exam or a low score in a lab task does not actually lead to low scores (Norem & Cantor, 1986a, 1986b; Cantor & Norem, 1989; Golub, 2004.

However, the conclusion these studies draw – that defensive pessimism is adaptive and beneficial to the individual – may be somewhat premature. They fail to consider the affective consequences of defensive pessimism, and therefore cannot be applied to a situation in which satisfaction is more important than individual performance (see Žužul, 2008 for an overview of this argument). The present article attempts to explore the effects of defensive pessimism in one such domain: that of romantic relationships.

Defensive Pessimism in Romantic Relationships

One of the domains in which satisfaction may be more important than individual performance is that of romantic relationships. After all, there are no objective measures of performance in this area. Instead, relationships are deemed successful if marked by high satisfaction of both members of the couple; on the other hand, they are deemed unsuccessful if marked by a lack of satisfaction.

Relationships are also an area in which individuals are likely to employ and exhibit defensively pessimistic thoughts and behaviors. Defensive pessimism is a "coherent pattern of expectations, appraisals, planning, effort and retrospection" (Norem, 2000, p. 78). Like all strategies, it is employed in order to meet and respond to the specific challenges of a particular task (Cantor & Harlow, 1994). It is therefore domain-specific, meaning that an individual may apply it in any one or more contexts of her life. Although it has been studied mainly in the academic context, it should be present in any personally relevant domain with the potential for success or failure.

Romantic relationships are one such domain: they hold great importance and personal relevance for individuals (Berscheid, 1985) and are marked by an obvious possibility of failure: divorce rates today hover around 50%, with some demographers predicting that as many as two-thirds of current marriages will end in divorce (Spanier, 1992), and approximately 30% of college relationships end within six to seven months (Rusbult, 1983; Fine & Sacher, 1997).

Indeed, examples of defensive pessimism in romantic relationships abound in every-day life. The idea that the end of a relationship is less painful if it is expected holds great common-sense appeal. Defensively pessimistic ideas are commonly repeated warnings spread by friends, magazines, and popular culture: you shouldn't trust someone too much at the start of a relationship because you might get hurt if that trust is betrayed; you shouldn't expect too much out of a relationship because you will only end up disappointed.

However, some evidence suggests that the popular intuition that defensive pessimism may be beneficial in a relationship may be unfounded. Defensive pessimism

actually be maladaptive in the domain of romantic relationships. An analysis of the already-studied properties of defensive pessimism will provide the logic behind this hypothesis; a longitudinal study of optimistic and pessimistic students involved in romantic relationships will attempt to prove that it is indeed correct.

Implications of Pessimistic Expectations on Relationship Dissolution

The first reason that defensive pessimism could be maladaptive in a relationship is that defensively pessimistic individuals may simply be more likely to break up. Empirical evidence suggests that Westerners tend to socially reject and dislike pessimists (Helweg-Larsen, Sadeghian, & Webb, 2002), a problem addressed as a potential cost of the strategy of defensive pessimism by even its staunchest defenders (Norem, 2000; Norem & Chang, 2000). Moreover, research has shown that, regardless of their own outlook on life, most people would prefer to engage in a relationship with an optimist rather than a pessimist (Dicke, 1998). Finally, research has shown that people who are rejection-sensitive – that is, who expect to be rejected by their romantic partners, and who interpret more behaviors as evidence of rejection – break up more frequently than people who are not similarly sensitive (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). Thus defensively pessimistic people might be broken up with more often because their partners might tire of their negativity and constant expectations of rejection, and may wish to pursue relationships with more optimistic individuals.

Implications of Pessimistic Expectations during a Relationship

Even the defensive pessimists whose relationships do not dissolve might incur costs because of their coping strategy; more specifically, they may be less satisfied with their continuing relationships. Studies on academic defensive pessimism have shown that defensive pessimists seem to be less satisfied in the face of success than optimists. Despite their good performances, defensive pessimists tend to be less satisfied than optimists with their results on various lab and academic tasks (Norem, 2000; Norem & Cantor, 1986b; Golub, 2004); moreover, towards the end of their college years, optimists are more satisfied with their overall academic achievement than defensive pessimists, even if these levels of achievement are the same (Eronen, Nurmi, & Salmela-Aro, 1998). If these findings are applied to the romantic domain, where continuation of a relationship can be defined as success, it seems that defensive pessimists should be less satisfied with and about their relationships than optimists.

One of the reasons this may be is because defensive pessimists are constantly expecting and preparing for the end of their relationships, and may therefore be motivated to devalue their relationships and their partners in order to prepare them-

selves for the failure they believe is forthcoming. This devaluation could lead to greater relationship dissatisfaction. Golub (2004) employs a useful analogy that effectively illustrates this potential phenomenon: "If the fox never gets the grapes, he will probably believe they are sour… However, if the fox succeeds in getting the grapes, a prior belief that they were sour might lessen his enjoyment of their flavor" (p. 6 – 7).

If defensive pessimists are motivated to devaluate their relationships through use of their strategy, they should actually grow to feel *worse* about these relationships as time goes on. Rusbult (1983) has shown that satisfaction in a relationship tends to increase as a function of time: people grow happier and happier with their relationships as they progress. The effects of a defensively pessimistic devaluation might interfere with this normal progression, causing relationship satisfaction to rise less steadily.

Implications of Pessimistic Expectations on Post-Breakup Affect

So perhaps a defensively pessimistic outlook in a romantic relationship can lead to certain costs for the individual: defensive pessimists may show higher rates of relationship dissolution and may be less satisfied in their relationships than optimists. However, defensive pessimism could still be viewed as an adaptive strategy for certain individuals. By setting low expectations, defensive pessimists attempt to protect themselves from the distress that is caused by failure or a negative outcome. As Joe, a defensively pessimistic student in a study conducted by Martin, Marsh, Williamson and Debus (2003) says, "I try to be pessimistic 'cause that way I think the fall's less when you do actually [fail]… I think if I border slightly on the pessimistic... if I do worse than expected then it's less of a fall. You just try to minimize your falls" (p. 621). If defensive pessimism does indeed minimize the "fall" of a breakup, it may be adaptive despite its negative effects during a relationship.

This is especially relevant when the negative emotional consequences of a breakup are taken into account. Following a breakup, both members of a couple feel a wide range of strong negative emotions, most notably anxiety, sadness, anger, and general distress (Choo, Levine, & Hatfield, 1996; Fine & Sacher, 1997). For some people, the wish to avoid or temper these negative emotions may be a stronger impetus than the longing for a satisfying relationship. Previous studies have suggested that a fear of failure, rather than a need for achievement, is a positive predictor of defensive pessimism (Elliot & Church, 2003). Defensive pessimists appear to be motivated by the whish to avoid a negative outcome rather than the wish to obtain a positive outcome. It seems logical that they should therefore employ a strategy which they believe will shield them from the pain of failure even if it does not ensure optimal success. So defensive pessimism may still be adaptive in the context of romantic relationships, since it may provide people who are motivated by a fear of failure with a way to minimize the "fall" that will inevitably follow that failure.

Indeed, both researchers and defensive pessimists themselves laud the strategy of defensive pessimism for its ability to shield the individual given failure (e.g. Norem & Cantor, 1986a; Martin, Marsh & Debus, 2003). However, this purported benefit of a defensively pessimistic outlook has failed to hold up in empirical studies. In the lab context, defensive pessimists have been shown to feel no better than optimists given failure: the very first study on defensive pessimism found that defensive pessimists and optimists felt equally poor given an unsatisfactory performance on an anagram task (Norem & Cantor, 1986a). Moreover, some recent research suggests that defensive pessimists may feel even *worse* than optimists given failure (Golub, 2004). This protective function may prove even more ineffective in the romantic context, where the pain of failure (in other words, a breakup) might be so strong as to override any effect a strategy may have. Defensive pessimism could therefore fail to redeem its negative effects during a relationship through its effects on feelings after a breakup, and thus may not be adaptive even for people whose primary motivation is loss-aversion.

In fact, defensive pessimism may be *maladaptive* given a breakup. Although optimists and pessimists may feel the same following the end of a relationship, some evidence suggests that defensive pessimists may recover from this pain at a slower pace. Unsurprisingly, the negative emotions that follow the end of a relationship have been found to decrease over time (Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr, & Vanni, 1998). There is, however, reason to believe that this decline might be slower for defensive pessimists than optimists. One of the biggest consistent differences found between optimists and defensive pessimists is that optimists attempt to justify failures through use of self-protective explanations (Norem & Cantor, 1986a, 1990). Optimists also focus on the fact that things could have been worse, and mentally play out even less desirable scenarios (Sanna, 1996). Following the end of a relationship, an optimist might protect herself by enumerating possible reasons it could have ended other than her own behavior ("We just weren't right for each other"), and might generate more alternative scenarios that would have been even worse ("Well, at least we broke up now, before I got *really* attached to him"). These post-hoc thoughts and downward alternatives might allow the optimist to restore esteem over a shorter period of time, and therefore help her get over her breakup.

Additionally, defensive pessimists might view a breakup as a confirmation of their initial beliefs about relationships in general (that is, that they are bound to end). As such, they might be inclined to generalize from their solitary negative experiences. This pessimistic explanation – that breakups are inevitable – might lead to a lack of hope for future relationships.

Implications of Pessimistic Expectations on Well-Being

Finally, prior defensive pessimism research has acknowledged a cost of this strategy, one that may be particularly salient in romantic relationships: emotional

over-exertion. Students who are defensively pessimistic in academics show deteriorating well-being by their third year in college: they profess experiencing greater stress, show higher rates of worry, sleeplessness, and hopelessness, and claim to be less satisfied with their lives than optimists (Cantor & Norem, 1989). As Cantor and Norem (1989) write, "in the long run, the wear and tear of the emotional ups and downs that characterize defensive pessimism…may take a toll on well-being" (p. 107). This is the case with academic defensive pessimism, where an individual has to deal with situations that require her use of the strategy only sporadically (before a test, paper, exam, etc.). In a relationship, an individual has to *constantly* remain defensively pessimistic: she is continually preparing herself for the worst. This is bound to have an even greater emotional effect than that produced by academic defensive pessimism. As such, the final cost of defensive pessimism may have an impact not simply limited to the relationship or breakup in question. Over time, it may lead the defensive pessimist to be less satisfied with life.

Examining the Impact of Pessimistic Expectations: The Present Study

One of the very first articles published on the subject of defensive pessimism suggested dating as a domain wherein this strategy could be investigated (Norem & Cantor, 1986b). Yet despite this initial suggestion and the abundance of work on defensive pessimism that has followed, research has completely neglected the domain of romantic relationships. While all of the relevant research cited suggests ways that defensive pessimism may be maladaptive in a romantic relationship, only a longitudinal analysis of individuals engaged in such relationships can confirm and prove these hypotheses.

METHOD

Participants

Undergraduate students who were engaged in romantic relationships were contacted through an online student directory to participate in a longitudinal study on the nature of romantic relationships. The initial recruiting email also served as an electronic consent form. Potential participants were told they would be able to drop out of the study at any point; that their results would remain completely confidential; and that all identifiers that linked their names to their results would be destroyed prior to analysis.

Of the initial undergraduates emailed, 227 agreed to participate. Of these, 144 (63.4%) were female and 83 (36.6%) were male. All were engaged in monogamous

romantic relationships that they considered either moderately or extremely serious. At the start of the study, most of the participants had been dating their respective partners for over six months: 26.3% had been dating for six months to a year; 33.5% for a year to two years; and 25.7% for two years or more. Only 13.4% of participants had dated their partners for less than six months, and only 3 participants had just begun their relationships in the past month.

The study began in early November 2004 and ended in early February 2004. After the initial surveys, participants were contacted 3 times for follow-up. By Time 4 (February), 54 people had dropped out of the study by stopping their completion of the surveys. The retention rate of participants was quite high given the longitudinal nature of the study: of those who began the study, 76.21% completed it.

Of the 173 participants who completed the study, 30 (17.3%) broke up with their partners by early February: 17 women and 13 men. 11 participants (36.7% of the total breakup pool) had ended their relationships by Time 2 in early December, 8 (26.7%) between Time 2 and Time 3 (early December to early January), and an additional 11 (36.7%) between Time 3 and Time 4 (early January to early February).

Measures

Defensive Pessimism. Participants were asked to fill out a measure designed to assess their use of defensive pessimism as a coping strategy in the domain of romantic relationships. Participants were asked to complete a 5-item adaptation of the revised Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire (DPQ; Norem, 2001), which was modified to relate specifically to romantic relationships. The measure was created by replacing the general possible negative outcomes of the revised Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire with relationship-specific ones. (See Appendix A).

Pessimism Scale. Participants' general pessimism or optimism was assessed using the Revised Life-Orientation Test (R-LOT; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994), a six-item questionnaire designed to assess the participants' general outlook on life, specifically the degree of optimism each participant expresses. The scale is highly reliable, with a test-retest reliability of .79 across 28 months, and contains high internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha = .78. The scale also shows strong convergent and discriminant validity, and is highly correlated with conceptually related scales (e.g. Original Life Orientation test, r = .95; Self-Mastery Scale, r = .48). All correlations reached significance at $p < .001$, two-tailed (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). Negatively worded items (items 2, 4, and 5) were reverse-scored before coding. (See Appendix B).

Self-Esteem Scale. Participants' self-esteem was evaluated using Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), a 10-item scale that measures individuals' feelings of global self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965). The RSES has good test-retest reliability, r = .80, $p < .05$; internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha = .87; and a high correlation

with other implicit and explicit self-esteem measures, including the Self-Attributes Questionnaire, r = .45, $p < .05$, and the Self-Competence, r = .79, $p < .05$, and Self-Liking Subscales, r = .85, $p < .05$ (Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000).

Relationship Satisfaction. Participants completed a relationship satisfaction scale designed to measure how happy and satisfied they were with their current partners. The scale consists of 7 questions that evaluate participants' satisfaction, happiness with partners, future outlooks, devaluations of other options, etc. The questions were designed following a series of pre-test interviews during which participants were asked what elements they believe are important for a successful relationship. (See Appendix C).

Life-Satisfaction Scale. Participants were asked to fill out the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), a 5-item scale designed to assess participants' general satisfaction with life by measuring their attitude towards and judgment of their lives (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The SWLS holds good test-retest reliability, r = .82 across two months (Diener, Emmons, Larsen ¸ Griffin, 1985), as well as high convergent validity with other self-report measures of satisfaction, ranging from r = -.30, $p < .001$ for the Self-Rating of Negative Affect to r = .62, $p < .001$ for the Self-Rating of Positive Affect, and with peer reports of satisfaction, r = .54, $p < .001$ (Pavot, Diener, Colvin, & Sandvik, 1991).

Control Questionnaire (Relationship). Participants completed a control questionnaire asking about the specifics of their relationships. The answers to this questionnaire were analyzed in light of the final results to ensure that one of these factors could not account for the differences found between optimists and defensive pessimists. Examples of control items assessed were duration of the relationship, the perceived seriousness of the relationship, the number of relationships the participant has been in prior to this one, etc. (See Appendix D)

Control Questionnaire (Breakup). Participants who had broken up with their partners were asked to complete a survey asking some specifics about the breakup, such as who initiated it (the participant or his/her partner), what terms the two partners ended on, etc. These questions were analyzed to exclude the possibility that the differences found between defensive pessimists and optimists were not simply due to the nature of the breakup. (See Appendix E).

Affect. Participant's feelings and attitudes following their breakups were assessed using a 7-item questionnaire. Questions included evaluate how hurt, upset, insecure, depressed, angry, disappointed, and hopeless the participants felt after their breakups. The emotions selected were based on an analysis of the emotions participants report feeling following a breakup in other studies as well pre-test interviews with people who had experienced a breakup within the past year. (See Appendix F).

Future Relationships. Participants' outlook on the possibility of future relationships was assessed using a 5-item scale, which investigates participants' beliefs about the likelihood and success of possible future relationships. (See Appendix G).

Procedure

The students who agreed to participate in the study (n = 227) were sent a follow-up email which contained links to a website comprised of several electronic surveys: a Relationship Control Questionnaire; a Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire; an adapted Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire (DPQ); the Revised Life-Orientation Test (R-LOT); Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES); and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).

At the end of each questionnaire, participants were asked to enter their initials and birth month. This information was used as an identifier that linked each participant's surveys together. Following completion of the study and before any results were analyzed, these identifiers were replaced with a number and destroyed.

All participants were contacted again for follow-up by email at the start of each month: in early December, January, and finally February.

Each time they were contacted, participants were asked to fill out one of two groups of surveys based on their current relationship status. Participants whose relationships had not ended (Group 1) were directed to the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire and the SWLS. These participants were sent follow-up emails every month asking them whether they were still engaged in the same relationships. If they were, they were directed to follow an identical procedure and fill out the same tests (Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire, SWLS).

Participants whose relationships had ended (Group 2) were directed to complete the Breakup Control Questionnaire; an Affect Scale assessing their feelings following the breakup; a Future Relationships scale; and the SWLS. These participants were sent follow-up emails each month asking them to complete the same surveys in order to analyze the longitudinal progression of their post-breakup feelings.

At Time 4, all participants were asked to complete the DPQ once again in order to attempt to establish the scale's test-retest reliability.

Finally, in mid-February, all participants received a de-briefing email describing the real purpose of the questionnaires, as well as the expected results of the study.

RESULTS

Defensive Pessimists and Strategic Optimists

Initial analyses were performed to identify participants as defensive pessimists or strategic optimists. Participants' mean defensive pessimism scores were calculated from their scores on each of the five questions of the adapted DPQ. These defensive pessimism scores were normally distributed ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.64$), with scores ranging from 1 to 8.2. Consistent with past research that used the Defen-

sive Pessimism Questionnaire (Norem, 2002; Norem & Illingworth, 1993; Golub, 2004), participants who scored in the top 30% of the adapted DPQ (n = 66) were classified as defensive pessimists. Those who scored in the bottom 30% (n = 76) were classified as strategic optimists. The participants who scored in the mid-range (n = 85) could not be classified as either, and their data was excluded from many subsequent analyses, as it was in the cited studies.

A one-sample *t* test revealed no significant differences between the mean defensive pessimism scores of men and women, t (222) = -1.604, p = .11, d = -.366. Of the 66 defensive pessimists, 45 were female and 20 were male; of the 76 optimists, 44 were female and 32 were male.

There was also no correlation found between participants' score on the DPQ and the length of their relationship (r = -.019, p = .80); in other words, participants were equally likely to hold negative expectations about relationships that had lasted for years as those that had started recently. There was also no correlation found between participants' score on the DPQ and the number of relationships they had been involved in before the current one (r = -.010, p = .697). Finally, there was no correlation found between the way the participants' past relationships had ended and their scores on the DPQ (r = -.009, p = .527); that is, participants who had never been broken up with in the past were just as likely to hold defensively pessimistic expectations as those who had been broken up with in *all* of their previous relationships.

There was a significant and moderately strong negative correlation between participants' defensive pessimism scores and their scores on the R-LOT (r = -.306, p < .001). Defensively pessimistic participants tended to score towards the pessimistic end of the life-orientation scale. This finding is in accordance with Norem and Cantor's (1986a) first study on defensive pessimism, which showed a similar correlation (r = .38) between this construct and other types of pessimism. Despite this moderately strong correlation, participants' scores on the R-LOT can only explain approximately 9% of the variance in their defensive pessimism scores (r_c = .091), indicating that defensive pessimism is a construct quite distinct from dispositional or orientational pessimism.

There was also a significant and relatively strong negative correlation found between defensive pessimism scores and scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (r = -.415, p < .001). That is, participants higher in defensive pessimism tended to have lower self-esteem scores. This finding is consistent with Yamawaki, Tschanz and Feick's (2004) study, which found a similar correlation (r = -.44, p < .001) between defensive pessimism scores and scores on the Rosenberg scale.

Defensive Pessimism and Relationship Dissolution

By the end of the study in early February (Time 4), a total of 30 participants had ended their relationships. Of these, 17 were female and 13 were male. There was

no significant relationship found between gender and likelihood of breakup, F (1, 171) = 1.79, p = .223.

Of the participants whose relationships had ended, more were defensive pessimists (n = 13) than optimists (n = 10) or neutral participants (n = 7). To assess the potential effects of defensive pessimism on relationship dissolution, a one-way ANOVA was completed, which showed these different relationship dissolution rates were significant, F (2, 170) = 3.481, p = .033.

Defensive Pessimism and Post-Break up Affect

Immediately following relationship dissolution, all participants showed relatively high levels of distress. The mean score for affective distress directly following breakup was 4.67 (SD = 1.73), with a range of 2.29 to 9.14.

There was no significant correlation found between defensive pessimism scores and levels of overall distress, r = .108, p = .625.

There were also no significant correlations found between levels of most specific emotions and defensive pessimism scores. Most participants tended to feel quite upset (M = 6.43, SD = 2.39), disappointed (M = 6.30, SD = 2.60), depressed (M = 4.96, SD = 2.50), and hurt (M = 4.74, SD = 2.63), and somewhat less insecure (M = 3.96, SD = 2.20), angry (M = 3.61, SD = 2.76), and hopeless (M = 2.70, SD = 2.51) following breakup. No significant correlations were found between participants' defensive pessimism and the extent to which they felt upset (r = -.058, p = .791), angry (r = .067, p = .762), hurt (r = -.004, p = .986), or hopeless (r = -.058, p = .791) following a breakup. There were moderate correlations found between defensive pessimism score and scores on the subscales of insecurity, depression, and disappointment. Defensive pessimists appeared to feel more depressed (r = .226, p = .299) and insecure (r = .293, p = .174) and less disappointed (r = -.245, p = .260) than optimists following a breakup. However, none of these results reached significance. This could be due to the low power in this part of the study, caused by the fact that few participants (n = 30) broke up over the span of three months.

One of the control variables asked of all participants was who initiated the breakup: the participant, his or her partner, both, or neither. Previous studies had shown that participants who were broken up with felt worse than those who did the breaking up (Sprecher, 1994). A two-way (Strategy x Initiation) ANOVA showed a main effect of initiation: participants who were broken up with showed higher rates of distress (M = 5.471) than participants who did the breaking up (M = 4.155) or whose breakups were mutual (M = 5.036). However, this difference failed to reach significance, F (2, 17) = 1.252, p = .311. No significant interaction was found between defensive pessimism score and initiation of breakup in predicting post-breakup distress, F (2, 17) = 2.278, p = .133.

A two-way (Strategy × Gender) ANOVA also found no main effect for gender, F (1, 19) = .721, p = .406.

Defensive Pessimism and Post-Breakup Recovery

As predicted, participants' distress over their breakups decreased over time. One month following relationship dissolution, participants' mean distress had dropped to from 4.67 (*SD* = 1.73) to 4.00 (*SD* = 2.04), with *min* = 1.86, *max* = 8.57.

This score was analyzed with regards to participants' status as defensive pessimists or optimists. A repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy) showed some differences in progression of distress over time between defensive pessimists and optimists. Optimists' distress seemed to decrease over time, from *M* = 4.40, *SD* = .917 directly following breakup to *M* = 3.60, *SD* = 1.676 one month after the breakup. Defensive pessimists' distress actually increased over time, from *M* = 4.20, *SD* = 2.80 directly following the break up to *M* = 4.40, *SD* = 1.97 after one month, as can be seen in Figure 1.

However, this difference failed to reach significance, $F(1, 9) = 1.174$, $p = .286$, possibly due to the extremely small number of participants who broke up and filled out follow-up surveys one month after the breakup (N = 10; 5 defensive pessimists and 5 optimists).

Certain specific measures of distress did manage to reach significance despite the low amount of data. The progression of disappointment over time was analyzed through a repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy). This ANOVA showed that the disappointment of optimists seemed to decrease with time, while that of defensive pessimists actually increased over time, as can be seen in Figure 2. The disappointment of optimists fell from *M* = 7.00, *SD* = 2.55 directly after the breakup (Time 1) to *M* = 4.60, *SD* = 3.29 one month after it (Time 2). The disappointment of defensive pessimists, on the other hand, rose from *M* = 5.20, *SD* = 2.387 at Time 1 to *M* = 6.40, *SD* = 3.05 at Time 2. These results reached significance, $F(1, 8) = 8.64$, $p = .019$.

Participants' progression of beliefs on future relationships was analyzed through a repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy). As Figure 3 shows, while optimists tended to regain their beliefs in successful future relationships one month following relationship dissolution, defensive pessimists did not. A repeated measures general linear model revealed that defensive pessimists' disbelief they would have successful future relationships remained at around the same level one month after relationship dissolution (*M* = 3.84, *SE* = .823) as it was directly following dissolution (*M* = 3.76, *SE* = .553). Optimists' disbelief subsided over time, falling from *M* = 4.88, *SE* = .553 directly after the breakup to *M* = 3.08, *SE* = .823 one month later. These results reached significance, $F(1, 8) = 5.119$, $p = .05$.

Thus the current results offer initial confirmation of the hypothesis that defensive pessimists recover more slowly from a breakup than optimists.

Defensive Pessimism during a Relationship

To assess the potential effects of defensive pessimism during a relationship, the satisfaction of all participants with their relationships at Time 1 was analyzed. The

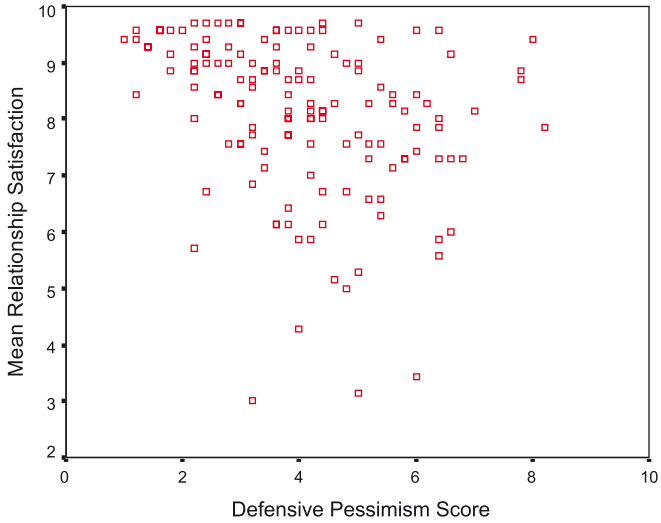

Figure 1: Correlation between defensive pessimism score and mean relationship satisfaction.

mean satisfaction was 7.91 (*SD* = 1.47), with scores ranging from 3.00 to 9.71. A partial correlation was completed to investigate the potential relationship between defensive pessimism and relationship satisfaction, controlling for the effects of self-esteem. As Figure 1 shows, there was a moderately strong and highly significant negative correlation found between defensive pessimism score and relationship satisfaction, r = -.332, *p* = .001: defensive pessimists appeared to be less satisfied in their relationships than optimists. A one-way ANOVA found that the mean satisfaction of defensive pessimists was *M* = 7.48, *SD* = 1.34, while the mean satisfaction of optimists was *M* = 8.40, *SD* = 1.44. This difference was once again found to be highly significant, *F* (1, 101) = 11.052, *p* = .001

A partial correlation controlling for self-esteem revealed a moderately strong correlation between defensive pessimism and partner satisfaction. Participants' answers to the question, "I often think I would be happier if I broke up with my partner" were correlated with their defensive pessimism scores, r = .266, *p* = .007. Defensive pessimists also reported feeling less happy with their partners than optimists (even when controlling for self-esteem): answers to the question, "My partner makes me happy a great deal of the time" were negatively correlated with defensive pessimism scores, r = -.326, *p* = 001.

These results present statistically significant evidence for the hypothesis that defensive pessimists are less satisfied in their relationships and with their partners than optimists. They also present some evidence that defensive pessimists engage in motivated devaluations of their partners, since scores on the DPQ are positively

correlated with participants' feelings about their projected relative happiness without their partners.

Defensive Pessimism and Relationship Satisfaction over Time

A repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy) was performed to evaluate the potential effects of defensive pessimism on relationship satisfaction across time. Because of a technical problem with the website containing applicable surveys, a number of participants failed to complete relevant surveys at Time 2 and Time 3; as such, only results from Time 1 and Time 4 were analyzed in order to include the highest number of optimistic and defensively pessimistic participants (n = 71).

Results revealed a main effect for time, F (1, 69) = 4.859, p = .031, such that relationship satisfaction tended to decrease with time. As Figure 6 shows, the rate of decrease of satisfaction was much higher for defensive pessimists than optimists. The satisfaction of optimists decreased very marginally: M = 8.64, SD = 1.221 at Time 1 to M = 8.59, SD = 1.073 at Time 4. The satisfaction of defensive pessimists decreased at a higher rate: M = 7.90, SD = 1.117 at Time 1 to M = 7.33, SD = 1.803. These results reached significance, F (1, 69) = 3.286, p = .074.

Results revealed a significant negative correlation between participants' defensive pessimism scores and their change in relationship satisfaction from Time 1 to Time 4, r = -.251, p = .035. That is, defensively pessimistic participants' satisfaction tended to drop at a higher rate than that of optimists over the course of three months. These findings suggest an additional longitudinal cost of defensive pessimism: besides having lower base-line satisfaction, the satisfaction of defensive pessimists decreases over time at a much quicker pace than that of optimists.

A repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy) was also used to analyze the progression of partner devaluation over time. Participants' answers to the question, "I often think I would be happier if I broke up with my partner" were analyzed at Time 1 and Time 4. The score for optimists remained the same over time (Time 1, M = 1.61, SD = 1.34; Time 4, M = 1.61, SD = 1.04). However, defensive pessimists appear to devaluate their partners over time: their scores rose from M = 2.38, SD = 1.28 at Time 1 to M = 3.29, SD = 2.48 at Time 4. Moreover, this interaction was quite significant, F (1, 68) = 4.902, p = .030. Thus, it appears that defensive pessimists do devalue their partners as their relationships progress.

Of course, these results only show that a relationship exists between defensive pessimism and relationship satisfaction and partner satisfaction, both at base-line and over time. They (like most correlative data) tell nothing of the causal relationship between the two variables. To attempt to establish this, the relationship between the difference in relationship satisfaction over time and the difference in defensive pessimism score over time was analyzed. All participants were asked to complete the same revised defensive pessimism score used in the beginning of the study at Time 4, and 148 of them did so.

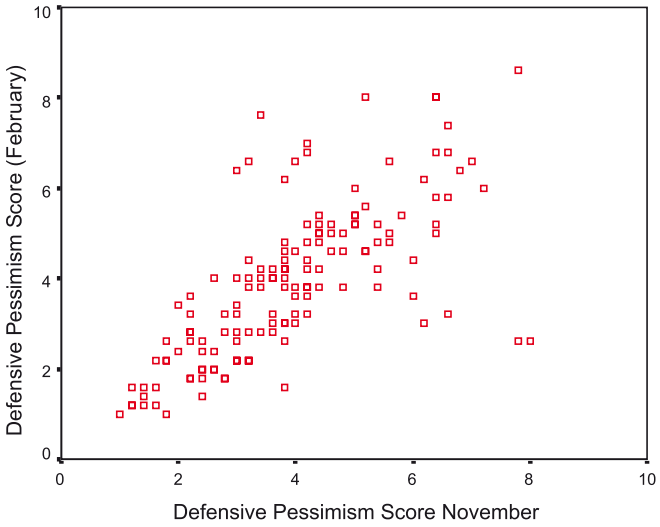

Figure 2. Correlation between defensive pessimism scores in November and February.

There was a strong and significant relationship between defensive pessimism score at T1 and T4, r = .709, $p < .001$, as can be seen in Figure 2. This strong correlation provides evidence of the test-retest reliability of the adapted DPQ. Participants' defensive pessimism scores in early November were found to be strong predictors of their scores in early February.

As discussed, the change in relationship satisfaction over these three months was also analyzed. The mean change in relationship satisfaction was -.33 (*SD* = 1.23). Once again, most participants tended to become slightly less satisfied with their relationships over time. However, no significant correlation was found between the difference in relationship satisfaction and the difference in defensive pessimism scores, r = -.153, $p = .094$. Although a weak negative correlation was found, it was not significant. Moreover, this analysis did not make a distinction between people whose relationship satisfaction grew and those whose relationship satisfaction decreased over time.

In order to take this into account, only data for people whose relationship satisfaction decreased at a rate higher than the mean decrease (-.33) was analyzed. These are participants who became more unsatisfied with their relationship than most. No significant correlation was found between their satisfaction difference and the difference in their defensive pessimism scores, r = -.11, $p = .409$. This shows that participants did not become more defensively pessimistic as they became more unsatisfied with their relationships, or as their relationships decreased in perceived quality.

Participants' general life satisfaction was evaluated through the SWLS. Participants' scores were normally distributed (M = 7.46, SD = 1.53; min = 2.60, max = 10). An independent means t test revealed no significant relationship between gender and life satisfaction, t (171) = .686, p = .494, d = .179.

A correlation between life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 showed a significant moderately strong relationship between life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, r = .209, p = .016. Participants with higher relationship satisfaction tended to have higher life satisfaction.

An independent samples t test revealed that, at Time 1 (November), defensive pessimists had lower life satisfaction than optimists, t (103) = 2.097, p = .038, d = .630. There was a negative correlation found between defensive pessimism score and life satisfaction, r = -.174, p = .022, confirming that at Time 1, defensively pessimistic participants tended to have lower life satisfaction than more optimistic participants.

A repeated measures ANOVA (Time × Strategy) showed no significant interaction between time and defensive pessimism in predicting life satisfaction. There was no significant difference in the rate of change of life satisfaction between defensive pessimists and optimists, F (1, 70) = 1.165, p = .284.

Despite this lack of interaction, an independent sample t test showed that defensive pessimists remained equally less satisfied than optimists at Time 4 (February), t (82) = 2.071, p = .042, d = .632.

The negative correlation between defensive pessimism score and life satisfaction also remained significant and moderately strong, r = -.231, p = .037.

There was no significant interaction found between gender and progression of life satisfaction, F (1, 126) = 1.329, p = .251.

DISCUSSION

The present study was completed in an effort to add to the current understanding of the costs and benefits associated with the strategy of defensive pessimism, specifically in romantic relationships. Its results not only challenge prevailing popular notions of defensive pessimism (i.e. that it is an adaptive and useful strategy), but suggest valuable, practical, and previously untested means of increasing satisfaction both during and after a relationship.

The results of the current study lend support to the hypothesis that defensive pessimism is a maladaptive strategy in the domain of romantic relationships. Defensive pessimism seems to bring about many costs for the individual: it increases rates of relationship dissolution, and decreases relationship and partner satisfaction, particularly over time. It does not, however, seem to provide the individual with

any protective benefits, since results indicate that it may fail to temper the pain of a break-up, possibly even increasing it over time. The present study was limited at times due to the relatively small number of participants who broke up; however, it still offers quite strong initial support of this hypothesis.

Impact of Defensive Pessimism on Relationship Dissolution

Results of the present study show that defensive pessimists were more likely to experience relationship dissolution than optimists or neutral participants. This finding is limited by the low number of participants whose relationships ended over the course of the study, but points to an interesting effect which merits further investigation. It offers initial evidence of the idea that defensive pessimism in a romantic relationship plays out as a self-confirming hypothesis: that is, by expecting relationship dissolution, defensive pessimists actually incur more instances of such dissolution.

Defensive Pessimism after a Relationship: The Impact of Pessimistic Expectations on Post-Breakup Affect

The results of the present study offer some evidence of the failure of defensive pessimism in cushioning and tempering the pain that necessarily follows a breakup. All participants who experienced relationship dissolution found it to be a painful and taxing experience. A breakup seems to be necessarily followed by a wide range of negative emotions, including (among others) depression, anger, disappointment, insecurity, and hopelessness. These emotions appear to be experienced uniformly, regardless of participants' gender or perceived control of the breakup. Although participants who were broken up with experienced more negative emotions than those who did the breaking up, the dissolution of a relationship seems to affect both in a strongly negative way.

The use of the strategy of defensive pessimism does not seem to cushion the pain of a breakup or prevent these negative emotions in any sort of meaningful way. As hypothesized, the present study found no differences between defensive pessimists and optimists in terms of post-breakup affect. Besides feeling the same rates of general distress, both groups felt equally hurt, angry and upset due to the end of their relationships. The pain of a breakup might override the effects any cushioning strategy could have, leading these strategies to play a negligent role in determining post-breakup distress.

The currents study indicates that defensive pessimism may fail to protect individuals in the case of relationship dissolution. The results of the present study show that defensive pessimism may cause increased instances of breakup; it may also fail to temper, and even appears to augment, the negative emotions that necessarily

follow breakup. Further studies with larger sample-sizes could investigate this phenomenon and attempt to isolate the relationship between defensive pessimism and specific negative emotions, particularly depression and insecurity.

Defensive Pessimism after a Relationship: The Impact of Pessimistic Expectations on Post-Breakup Recovery

Results of the present study suggest that optimists recover from relationship dissolution more quickly than defensive pessimists. Optimists felt lower rates of all negative emotions one month following breakup: their path to recovery appeared to follow the standard trajectory proposed by Sprecher, Felmlee, Metts, Fehr and Vanni (1998), wherein negative emotions decrease with time. Results indicated that defensive pessimists, however, experienced *higher* levels of negative emotions one month after their breakup than directly following the breakup.

A similar result was obtained with regards to participants' beliefs about future relationships. Directly following a breakup, all participants had little faith in their ability to pursue successful future relationships. In fact, optimists seemed slightly more unenthusiastic about the possibility of future relationships than defensive pessimists. However, optimists seemed to regain their belief with time: results show that one month after their breakups they appeared quite confident in their ability to have a successful relationship in the near future. Defensive pessimists, however, did not appear to experience the same surge of confidence and faith: their scores one month after the breakup remained almost identical to their scores directly after the breakup.

The present study, then, gives some credence to the hypothesis that defensive pessimists recover more slowly from relationship dissolution than optimists. This may be linked to defensive pessimists' inability to engage in protective post-hoc thoughts and alternatives, coupled with their potential propensity towards pessimistic causal explanations. The optimist who has enumerated various reasons her relationship may have ended may be able to settle on a cause quite apart from her and it seems that this would also lead her to recover more quickly from her breakup. The present study's results on future relationship perspectives also suggest her optimism might lead her to adopt the "plenty of fish in the sea" mantra, which could presumably lead her to move on successfully from her breakup.

The defensive pessimist, however, is likely to follow quite a different path. As discussed, when her negative expectations are confirmed she might be tempted to conclude that they were indeed accurate, and is therefore likely to apply and generalize them to the future. While the optimist who does not expect this failure is able to treat it as an anomaly, a solitary negative event that she can move on from, a defensive pessimist might view such failure as a confirmation of her initial beliefs about relationships: that is, that they are bound to end. This confirmation can easily

lead to stable, global and internal causal attributions for a breakup, thereby causing negative both views on future relationships and greater distress given the passage of time.

Defensive Pessimism after a Relationship: Impact of Pessimistic Expectations on Post-breakup Disappointment

Despite all of the negative effects discussed above, results of the present study do at first glance appear to point to one area in which defensive pessimism seems to serve its purported aim of cushioning the impact of failure. The results of the present indicate that defensive pessimists did feel less disappointed following relationship dissolution than optimists, although this finding did not reach significance due to the small amount of data analyzed. These results nevertheless appear to suggest that negative expectations do seem to prepare a person for failure in some sense by protecting from disappointment given such failure.

However, although defensive pessimism might shield people from disappointment directly following relationship dissolution, results indicate it may actually *increase* disappointment with the passing of time. The present study found that optimists' disappointment decreased greatly a month after a breakup. However, the disappointment of defensive pessimists seemed to grow over time: after a month, defensive pessimists were actually more disappointed than optimists.

So although negative expectations might shield individuals from initial disappointment, they actually increase that disappointment over time. This is consistent with the hypothesis presented earlier: defensive pessimists' negative expectations may actually work to delay their post-breakup recovery and can therefore cause increased negative affect with the passing of time.

Defensive Pessimism during a Relationship: The Impact of Pessimistic Expectations on Relationship and Partner Satisfaction

The results of the present study suggest that defensive pessimism is not adaptive following the end of a relationship. Moreover, they suggest that it is in fact a maladaptive strategy to employ *during* a relationship. The most significant finding of the present study is the fact that defensive pessimists were, on average, less satisfied in their relationships than optimists. This finding remained highly significant even when gender and self-esteem were taken into account. As hypothesized, defensive pessimists truly did seem to believe their relationships are less satisfying and gratifying.

The present study offers evidence for the hypothesis that defensive pessimists are motivated to devalue their partners, and that this leads to their lowered relationship satisfaction. Defensive pessimists were significantly less satisfied with their

partners than optimists. They also held higher opinions of possible alternatives: compared to optimists, defensive pessimists were more likely to believe they would be happier without their partners. Results discussed earlier indicate that this is not actually the case: defensive pessimists felt strong negative emotions when left partner-less. This unsubstantiated belief may be an example of a motivated devaluation. In order to prepare themselves for the impending breakup they are so certain will come, defensive pessimists may convince themselves that they would be better off without their partners, though this belief is ultimately wrong. Their negative expectations, coupled with this devaluation, lead them to experience significantly lower rates of both partner and relationship satisfaction.

Relationship Satisfaction over Time

Unlike other studies on relationships (e.g. Rusbult, 1983), this study found that participants' relationship satisfaction tended to decrease rather than increase over time. This deterioration in satisfaction could be due to a few factors. The first of these possibilities is related to the month, and more specifically the season, that the relationship satisfaction questionnaires were administered. The first time participants were contacted was in November (the fall); the last was in February (the winter). Several studies have shown the existence of a seasonal affective disorder; that is, many people tend to become more depressed during winter months (e.g. Rosenthal, Sack, Gillin, Lewy, Goodwin, Davenport, Mueller, & Wehr, 1984; Rosenthal, 1993). Moreover, a study of northeastern college students (a sample very similar to this one) showed that over half of the students experienced decreased mood, energy level, and social activity level in the winter months of January and February (Rohan & Sigmon, 2000). Though no studies have attempted to identify a link between relationship satisfaction and seasonal variation, the increased depression and decreased mood and social activity students appear to experience in winter could easily lead to decreased relationship quality and decreased relationship satisfaction. So perhaps this sample of students did not become more unsatisfied over time; the difference in satisfaction from November to February could simply be due to seasonal change.

Despite the fact that all participants' satisfaction decreased over time, an analysis that separated defensive pessimists and optimists indicates that defensive pessimists grew much more unsatisfied as time went on. While satisfaction of optimists decreased only marginally, the satisfaction of defensive pessimists decreased relatively strongly. Results also indicate that defensive pessimists' satisfaction with their partners decreased over time; that is, their belief that they would be happier without their partners appeared to grow significantly stronger, while that of optimists remained the same.

These results can be viewed as evidence of defensive pessimists' ongoing devaluation of their partners compared to perceived available alternatives. Defensive

pessimists' persistent negative expectations may lead them to devaluate their partners more and more in order to prepare for a breakup. This devaluation, in turn, may lead to deceased relationship satisfaction over time.

An Alternate Explanation?

The proponents of the strategy of defensive pessimism may be quick to point out an obvious problem with the current study: it is a correlational rather than experimental study, and the results presented cannot therefore establish causality. Indeed, it is quite easy to conceive of an alternate explanation for present results. Perhaps defensive pessimists are simply more realistic about their relationships than optimists. In other words, perhaps a bad or unsatisfying relationship may cause negative expectations for that relationship, and not the other way around. Perhaps defensive pessimists are simply people who have worse partners or worse relationships (potentially due to their lower rates of self-esteem, or higher dispositional pessimism). Their negative expectations are thus justified by the reality of their relationships, and it is these bad relationships that cause their defensive pessimism.

This is an interesting hypothesis, but one that can be eliminated for several reasons. Firstly, defensive pessimism appears to be unrelated to past relationships. People who had been in no previous relationships, and thus could have no realistic basis for their negative expectations, were just as likely to be defensively pessimistic as those who had been in one, two, three, or more. Even more importantly, defensive pessimism is unrelated to the outcome of past relationships. That is, a person who had never been broken up with was just as likely to be a defensive pessimist as one who had been broken up with a number of times; conversely, a person whose past partners had all left her was just as likely to be an optimist as one who had never experienced a breakup. These results suggest that defensive pessimism is a strategy which is not based on prior experience.

Despite this, one could still argue that it is the state of a person's *present* relationship that leads her to hold negative rather than positive expectations. However, the longitudinal results of the current study eliminate this causal possibility. As previously mentioned, the relationship satisfaction of both optimists and defensive pessimists tended to fall over time. However, this change in satisfaction over time does not appear to be significantly related to participants' change in defensive pessimism score, which remained quite stable over time. Participants who became less satisfied over time *did not* become more pessimistic. In other words, results indicate that people do not become more defensively pessimistic as their relationships decline in quality. Since this deterioration in perceived relationship quality does not cause increased defensive pessimism, it seems safe to assume that bad relationships are not the cause of negative expectations. The alternative hypothesis can therefore be disqualified, and the causal direction must flow the other way; that is, it must be defensive pessimism that causes a decline in relationship satisfaction.

Additional Costs of Defensive Pessimism: The Impact of Pessimistic Expectations on Life Satisfaction

The results of the present study indicate a final cost of defensive pessimism: it appears to have a serious impact on participants' general life satisfaction. In both November and February, defensively pessimistic participants were found to score significantly lower in life satisfaction than optimists. Defensive pessimists appeared to be less satisfied with their lives as a whole, and tended to view them in a harsher and more negative light.

These results further compliment previous studies, which had found that the life satisfaction of academic defensive pessimists is also lower than that of optimists (e.g. Cantor & Norem, 1989). This finding can be explained in two ways. As Cantor and Norem (1989) suggest, defensive pessimism is a taxing strategy, characterized by constant negative expectations and emotional exertion, which can lead to decreased well-being and satisfaction. Romantically defensive pessimists are constantly worried that their relationships will end, and this perpetual stress and anxiety is bound to have a negative impact on their overall well-being. Additionally, through use of their negative strategy, defensive pessimists deny themselves the opportunity to engage in truly satisfying relationships. Unsurprisingly, such relationships are correlated with life satisfaction. By lowering relationship satisfaction, the strategy of defensive pessimism lowers even life satisfaction. More than anything else, it is this broad impact that renders it a maladaptive strategy in the domain of romantic relationships.

Areas for Future Research

The present study represents the first time defensive pessimism or the impact of negative expectations has been investigated in the field of romantic relationships. As any first effort, then, it leaves many unanswered questions to be evaluated in further future studies.

The most important way the results of the current study could be complimented is through a larger-scale replication of the same or similar methodology. The rate of breakup was quite low in the current study: of the initial participants, only 30 broke up over the course of three months, most likely due to the serious nature of the relationships participants were engaged in. As such, data gathered from those participants, while pointing to interesting psychological phenomena, often failed to reach statistical significance. A large-scale replication might increase the power of the study, thereby endowing results with more significance.

It is also important to note that the participants in the present study represent a limited sample: they are all college students involved in moderately serious to very serious dating relationships. Prior research suggests that the costs and benefits of optimism and pessimism may vary across an individual's life span (Norem

& Chang, 2000). The nature of romantic relationships also changes with age, and findings based on data from dating relationships cannot always be generalized to more serious types of unions, the most obvious among them being marriage. While defensive pessimism fails to protect from the pain of a breakup, can it shield a person from the greater pain that follows divorce? Do negative expectations decrease satisfaction with long-term partners and relationships (i.e. people who have been married for five, or ten, or twenty years)? A replication of the present study using slightly older participants engaged in more serious unions could offer interesting answers to deepen knowledge of the impact of defensive pessimism in a romantic context even further.

Finally, the findings of the present study inherently prompt another area of research, and it is in this prompt that their very import lies. The present data shows that defensive pessimists are worse off during a relationship, and at best no better off given a breakup. A question that naturally arises from this data, then, is how to encourage defensive pessimists to become more optimistic, thereby increasing partner, relationship, and even life satisfaction.

This question becomes especially pertinent when prior findings on academic defensive pessimism. Prior studies have demonstrated that defensive pessimists who are forced to think optimistically perform worse on subsequent tasks; moreover, if they are prevented from thinking in their defensively pessimistic ways, they feel worse about their performance on these tasks (Norem & Illingworth, 1993). It may seem impossible, then, to aid defensive pessimists in romantic relationships: an abandonment of their negative expectations may actually lead to higher anxiety and even worse outcomes.

However, as Martin, Marsh and Debus (2003) point out, *thinking about* a negative outcome is markedly different than *expecting* a negative outcome. Yet the studies that show defensive pessimists performing and feelings worse involve a manipulation which forces defensive pessimists not to consider any negative outcomes at all: that is, to suppress all negative *thoughts* rather than just negative *expectations* (Norem & Illingworth, 1993).

Perhaps the way to help defensive pessimists might be to encourage them to think about and consider *all* of the possible outcomes for their relationships. This might prevent them from incurring the negative feelings that seem to be brought about through forced optimism, as discussed above. However, they should also be encouraged *not* to expect the worst of these outcomes to occur, and it is this forced eradication of negative expectations which should hopefully make them happier with their relationships, and better able to cope if these relationships end.

Another potential way to help defensive pessimists might be to start with a change in lifestyle, which could in turn perpetuate a change in mindset. As discussed, defensive pessimists are people who feel relatively poorly about their lives when compared to optimists. Lowered life satisfaction might prompt negative expectations in relationships, which could in turn lower life satisfaction even further.

This negative cycle could potentially be stopped if defensive pessimists are encouraged to improve their life satisfaction in areas distinct from their relationships. They could be guided towards common methods used to uplift mood and increase life-satisfaction, such as taking up new hobbies, spending more time with friends, leading healthier lifestyles, etc. If they were to become more satisfied with themselves and their lives, many defensive pessimists might be compelled to abandon their pessimistic expectations in romantic relationships, and this could lead to more satisfying and longer-lasting relationships.

While the present study suggests ways to help defensive pessimists, these suggestions need to be validated through future studies. These could attempt to induce defensive pessimists to think more optimistically, and then look at the relative relationship and life satisfactions of "pure" defensive pessimists versus those who go through the induction. Longitudinal studies could also attempt to explore the potential impact that various mood-enhancing activities could have on defensive pessimists' life satisfaction, and how this could affect their subsequent mindset (optimistic vs. defensively pessimistic) and relationship satisfaction. Such research could capitalize on the findings of the current study in order to answer the most important question proposed by these results: how can we increase the satisfaction and well-being of defensive pessimists in romantic relationships?

CONCLUSION

The present study combines two areas of psychological research in an attempt to add to knowledge of both. It provides new information to the study of defensive pessimism by expanding the concept to a previously-untested domain, and thereby adding further complexity to present notions of pessimism and optimism. It also adds to current understanding of beneficial strategies in romantic relationships, and suggests a way to increase relationship satisfaction without increasing the costs inherent in relationship dissolution.

As discussed, the results of the present study suggest that defensive pessimism is not a beneficial or adaptive strategy in romantic relationships. Expecting and preparing for the worst does not seem to prepare individuals when the worst does occur; a breakup is no less painful simply because it is expected. In fact, negative expectations seem to leave individuals unable to effectively bounce back from their breakups. They also appear to lessen relationship and even life quality. These negative and defensive expectations hamper an individual's well-being and satisfaction without giving much in return; they can therefore be deemed maladaptive in the domain of romantic relationships.

It is important to note that the findings of the present study do not challenge previous domain-specific findings on defensive pessimism. Defensive pessimism might truly be an adaptive strategy in terms of cognitive lab-tasks or academic suc-

cess. What the findings of the present study *do* suggest is that defensive pessimism cannot be labeled as a "good kind of pessimism" across all domains. In the arena of romantic relationships, defensive pessimism seems to come with many costs without providing many benefits. It appears to decrease relationship satisfaction and even life satisfaction during a relationship, while failing to protect affect following the end of a relationship.

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PRIPREMA ZA NAJGORE: OBRAMBENI PESIMIZAM U ROMANTIČNIM ODNOSIMA

Sažetak

Opsežni opus istraživanja podržava ideju da je obrambeni pesimizam, strategija pri kojoj pojedinci postavljaju niska očekivanja u rizičnim situacijama, adaptivna i pozitivna forma pesimizma. Međutim pojedini nalazi upućuju na to da obrambeni pesimizam nije adaptivan u svim situacijama, a osobito ne u romantičnim vezama. Longitudinalno istraživanje na studentima u romantičnim vezama (N = 227) pokazuje da obrambeni pesimizam uistinu nije korisna strategija u ovoj domeni. Obrambeni pesimizam ne štiti pojedinca od negativnih posljedica nakon prekida veze. Nasuprotno tome, obrambeni pesimizam usporava oporavak od prekida, koji je češći kod pesimista nego optimista. Obrambeni pesimizam također uzrokuje nepoželjne posljedice tijekom same veze. Obrambeni pesimisti su češće nezadovoljni svojim partnerima i općenito vezama. Obrambeni pesimizam također donosi dodatne psihološke "troškove" u ostalim područjima života: obrambeni pesimisti pokazuju niže razine životnog zadovoljstva nego optimisti. Ovi rezultati upućuju na to da iako obrambeni pesimizam može biti koristan u drugim domenama, on nije pozitivna strategija u romantičnim vezama.

Ključne riječi: obrambeni pesimizam, optimizam, romantične veze, prekid

Primljeno: 14. 10. 2008.

APPENDIX A

Adapted Revised Pessimism Questionnaire

Please take some time to think about your feelings and thoughts about your current relationship. Answer the following questions as carefully and accurately as possible.

Each of the statements below describes how people sometimes think or feel about relationships. In the blank space besides each statement, please select from 1 to 10 the extent to which you feel this statement reflects your attitude towards your partner, your relationship, or relationships in general.

1 = *Not at all true of me*
5 = *Somewhat true of me*
10 = *Extremely true of me*

* * *

1. I usually go into relationships expecting that they will not work out.
   (Select 1 – 10)
2. I often think about how I would feel if my partner and I broke up.
   (Select 1 – 10)
3. I am careful not to become overconfident that my partner will not break up with me.
   (Select 1 – 10)
4. I have spent time thinking about what I would do if my partner broke up with me.
   (Select 1 – 10)
5. I believe that considering the possibility that my relationship will end soon will help me to prepare if it actually does end.
   (Select 1 – 10)

APPENDIX B

Revised Life-Orientation Test

In the blank space besides each statement, please indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 how well you feel it describes you, your feelings, and your attitudes.

1 = *Not at all true of me*
5 = *Somewhat true of me*
10 = *Extremely true of me*

* * *

1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.
   (Select 1 – 10)
2. If something can go wrong for me, it will. (**Reverse Scored**)
   (Select 1 – 10)
3. I'm always optimistic about my future.
   (Select 1 – 10)
4. I hardly ever expect things to go my way. (**Reverse Scored**)
   (Select 1 – 10)
5. I rarely count on good things happening to me. (**Reverse Scored**)
   (Select 1 – 10)
6. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.
   (Select 1 – 10)

APPENDIX C

Relationship Satisfaction Scale

Please take some time to think about your thoughts and attitudes about your current relationship. Answer the following questions as honestly and accurately as possible.

In the blank space besides each statement, please select from 1 to 10 the extent to which you feel this statement reflects your attitude towards your partner or your relationship.

1 = *Not at all true*
5 = *Somewhat true*
10 = *Very true*

* * *

1. I am very satisfied in my relationship.
   (Select 1 – 10)
2. I often think I would be happier if I broke up with my partner.
   (**Reverse Scored**)
   (Select 1 – 10)
3. My partner makes me happy a great deal of the time.
   (Select 1 – 10)
4. I look forward to a future with my current partner.
   (Select 1 – 10)
5. I still think there are people out there who are better for me that my current partner is. (**Reverse Scored**)
   (Select 1 – 10)
6. I often feel grateful to be in my current relationship.
   (Select 1 – 10)
7. I feel that my partner and I are equals in our relationship; we both give and take about an equal amount.
   (Select 1 – 10)

APPENDIX D

Relationship Control Questions

Please answer the following questions about your relationship as accurately and honestly as possible. If you feel that none of the choices provided accurately represent your

relationship, please select "Other" and use the empty space at the end of each question to clarify.

* * *

1. How long have you been dating this particular partner?
   a. 1 month or less
   b. 3 months or less
   c. 3 – 6 months
   d. 6 months – 1 year
   e. 1 – 2 years
   f. Longer that 2 years
   g. Other

2. How serious do you believe this relationship is?
   a. Not serious
   b. Moderately serious
   c. Very serious
   d. Other

3. Are you and your partner also seeing other people?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. I don't know…
   d. Other

4. How many serious relationships have you been in prior to this one?
   a. None
   b. One
   c. Two
   d. Three
   e. More than three
   f. Other

5. Of those relationships, were more ended by yourself or your partner?
   a. Not applicable (have never been in a serious relationship)
   b. All were ended by me
   c. More were ended by me than by my partner
   d. About half were ended by me and about half by my partner
   e. More were ended by my partner
   f. All were ended by my partner
   g. Other

APPENDIX E

Breakup Control Questions

Please take some time to think about the end of your relationship. Answer the following questions as accurately and honestly as possible. If you feel that none of the choices provided accurately represent your situation, please select "Other" and use the empty space at the end of each question to clarify.

* * *

1. How long ago did your relationship end?
   a. < 1 week
   b. 1 – 2 weeks
   c. 2 – 4 weeks
   d. 4 + weeks
   e. Other

2. Who initiated the break-up?
   a. Myself
   b. My partner
   c. Mutual
   d. Other

3. If you answered myself in Q2, did your partner do anything specific (e.g. cheat, etc.) that caused you to want to end the relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not applicable
   d. Other

4. If you answered my partner in Q2, did you do anything specific (e.g. cheat) that caused your partner to want to end the relationship?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Not applicable
   d. Other

5. What terms did you and your partner leave off on?
   a. Very poor terms – we will not be speaking to each other any time soon
   b. Moderately poor terms

c. Neither good nor bad terms
d. Moderately good terms
e. Very good terms – we will stay close friends in the future
f. Other

APPENDIX F

Post-Breakup Affect Scale

When answering the following questions, please think about the feelings caused by your breakup. Please answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible.

On a scale of 1 to 10, please select the extent to which you feel each of the following emotions as a result of your breakup.

1 = *Do not feel the emotion at all*
5 = *Feel the emotion moderately*
10 = *Feel the emotion strongly*

* * *

Because of the end of my relationship, I feel….

1. Upset?
   (Select 1 – 10)
2. Insecure?
   (Select 1 – 10)
3. Disappointed?
   (Select 1 – 10)
4. Angry?
   (Select 1 – 10)
5. Hurt?
   (Select 1 – 10)
6. Depressed?
   (Select 1 – 10)
7. Hopeless?
   (Select 1 – 10)

APPENDIX G

Future Relationship Perspectives Questionnaire

Please take a moment to think about your attitudes and feelings towards future relationships. Please answer the following questions as accurately and honestly as possible.

In the blank space besides each statement, please select from 1 to 10 the extent to which you feel this statement reflects your attitude toward future relationships.

1 = *Not at all true*
5 = *Somewhat true*
10 = *Very true*

* * *

1. I don't believe I will have a successful relationship any time in the near future.
   (Select 1 – 10)
2. I feel that I will have trouble finding a partner who will commit to me.
   (Select 1 – 10)
3. I still believe that I will meet the "right person" in the future.
   (Select 1 – 10)
4. I am hesitant to enter into a new relationship any time soon.
   (Select 1 – 10)
5. I believe I will be more cautious about entering into a future relationship than I was going into this one.
   (Select 1 – 10)

