VU Research Portal

Conflict in intimate versus non-intimate relationships: When gender role stereotyping overrides biased self-other judgment

Kluwer, E.S.; de Dreu, C.K.W.; Buunk, B.P.

published in

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships
1998

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1177/0265407598155004](https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598155004)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Kluwer, E. S., de Dreu, C. K. W., & Buunk, B. P. (1998). Conflict in intimate versus non-intimate relationships: When gender role stereotyping overrides biased self-other judgment. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 15, 637-650. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598155004>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

E-mail address:

vuresearchportal.ub@vu.nl

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships

<http://spr.sagepub.com/>

Conflict in Intimate vs Non-Intimate Relationships: When Gender Role Stereotyping Overrides Biased Self-Other Judgment

Esther S. Kluwer, Carsten K.W. de Dreu and Bram P. Buunk

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships 1998 15: 637

DOI: 10.1177/0265407598155004

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://spr.sagepub.com/content/15/5/637>

Published by:

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

[International Association for Relationship Research](#)

Additional services and information for *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://spr.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://spr.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://spr.sagepub.com/content/15/5/637.refs.html>

CONFLICT IN INTIMATE VS NON-INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS: WHEN GENDER ROLE STEREOTYPING OVERRIDES BIASED SELF-OTHER JUDGMENT

Esther S. Kluwer

University of Groningen

Carsten K.W. de Dreu

University of Amsterdam

Bram P. Buunk

University of Groningen

ABSTRACT

An experiment was conducted to explore whether bias in self-other judgments pertains to conflict in intimate relationships and is overruled by gender role stereotypes in non-intimate relationships between males and females. It was predicted that when the opponent was one's intimate partner, both male and female participants would rate themselves as intending more cooperative and less competitive behavior than their partner. In non-intimate relationships, females were predicted to rate their male opponent as less cooperative and more competitive, whereas males were predicted to rate their female opponent as *more* cooperative and *less* competitive. A sample of 46 male and 46 female participants rated their own intention to cooperative and competitive conflict behaviors, and that of an opposite-sex opponent, in a hypothesized conflict situation. The results supported the hypotheses. Implications for further research, as well as applications in the field of marital counseling, are discussed.

KEY WORDS • gender role stereotyping • intimate relationships • non-intimate relationships • self-other judgment

A previous version of this article was presented at the annual conference of the ISSPR, Groningen, The Netherlands, June 1994. This research was conducted while the first author was at George Mason University as a visiting graduate student in the International Student Exchange Program (ISEP). We are much indebted to Daniel Druckman and Anita Taylor for their supervision during the data collection. We thank Steve Duck and three anonymous reviewers for their comments and suggestions on a previous draft. Correspondence to: Esther Kluwer, University of Groningen, Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, Grote Kruisstraat 2/1, 9712 TS Groningen, The Netherlands. [email: e.s.kluwer@ppsw.rug.nl.]

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships Copyright © 1998 SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi), Vol. 15(5): 637–650. [0265–4075 (199810) 15:5; 004944]

Although some close relationships seem to be conflict-free, most relationships are at least occasionally affected by conflicts between the partners (Canary et al., 1995). Conflicts between intimate partners may gradually affect relationship satisfaction negatively through an accumulation of negative interpretations of conflict episodes (Holmes & Murray, 1996), and may in some cases escalate into serious events including emotional and physical abuse. In part, because of the anger that characterizes conflict, various cognitive processes come into play that seem to contribute to conflict escalation. These include the perception of both partners that they are the victim and the other is the perpetrator, a focus upon the negative features of the partner's behavior, a selective recall of negative information about the partner, and attributional conflict in which individuals view their own transgressions as less serious than that of the partner and assume their own interpretation of the situation is the only one possible (Holmes & Murray, 1996).

The present research examines self–other bias as an additional cognitive process that may contribute to conflict escalation in close relationships. Recent studies outside the close relationships area have pointed to the important role of this bias in interpersonal conflict. There is clear evidence that individuals tend to perceive themselves as fairer, better and more cooperative than others (Kramer et al., 1993). Such biased self–other judgments are associated with conflict escalation, and predict stalemate, probability of future conflict, and integrativeness of dispute resolution (De Dreu et al., 1995). The current research was designed to explore whether bias in self–other judgments pertains to conflict in intimate relationships and is overruled by gender role stereotypes in conflict between non-intimate opposite-sex opponents.

Researchers often assume that men and women behave differently when managing interpersonal conflict. Men are viewed as being rational, objective, competitive, independent and ambitious, whereas women are considered to be emotional, warm, dependent, cooperative and vulnerable (Cupach & Canary, 1995; Schaap et al., 1988). However, reviews and meta-analyses cast doubt on the generalizability and strength of sex differences when it comes to actual *behavior*. Research on conflict and negotiation between non-intimate opponents revealed no systematic relationship between sex and conflict behavior, for example, in terms of the relative frequency in which males and females cooperate (for an overview, see Rubin & Brown, 1975). Similarly, recent meta-analytic reviews show negligible effect sizes for the comparison between men and women in their tendency to use coercive tactics (Krone et al., 1994), their tendency to avoid and accommodate (Gayle et al., 1994), or in verbal aggression (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996).

Research in the field of close relationships shows that men and women exhibit some differences in conflict behavior, but the findings are inconsistent (Cupach & Canary, 1995; Schaap et al., 1988). A notable exception, however, is the finding that in interaction with their partner women tend to show 'pursuing' behaviors — pressuring, demanding change, nagging,

blaming and criticizing — while men tend to show ‘distancing’ behaviors — physical withdrawal, becoming silent, defending and avoiding (e.g. Kluwer et al., 1997; Schaap et al., 1988). It should be noted, however, that this sex difference is qualified by relational and situational factors. For example, distressed couples appear to be especially prone to this demand/withdraw interaction, whereas non-distressed couples are less likely to show these patterns of conflict behaviors (Christensen & Schenk, 1991). Second, Christensen & Heavey (1990) showed that the structure of the conflict — whoever wanted a change in the spouse’s behavior — largely determined who engaged in demanding behaviors.

The above review shows that there are few systematic differences in conflict behavior between men and women, both in intimate and non-intimate relationships. However, in general, perceived stereotypical differences between men and women probably outweigh actual behavioral differences (Cupach & Canary, 1995; Keashly, 1994), and *perceptions* of conflict behavior are likely to be biased by stereotypic expectations for men and women. That is, men are *expected and seen* to be dominant and competitive, while women are *expected and seen* to be submissive and cooperative.

Perceptions of conflict behavior are also likely to be biased by self-enhancing judgments of the own and the other’s behaviors. Biased self-other judgment has both a motivational and a cognitive determinant (Hoorens, 1993). The motivational determinant is that people are generally motivated to maintain and enhance a positive self-image (Hoorens, 1993). Hence, people are tempted to discount their own negative behaviors and enhance their own positive behaviors. The cognitive determinant of biases in self-other judgment is related to the fact that other people’s negative features, traits and behaviors are generally more diagnostic and threatening than other people’s positive features, traits and behaviors (Taylor, 1991). Hence, people tend to remember others’ negative behaviors better than others’ positive behaviors. As a result, they may quickly have the impression that others perform, on average, more negative behaviors and less positive behaviors than they do themselves. Consequently, individuals involved in interpersonal conflict judge themselves as more cooperative and as less competitive than their opponents (De Dreu et al., 1995).

A related issue is the actor-observer effect: the pervasive tendency to explain others’ behavior as dispositional, stable factors, and one’s own behavior as caused by situational, unstable factors (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). As an actor, one’s own behavior is less salient than the situational forces impinging on one’s own behavior, so causality is attributed to the situation. By contrast, when observing another person, that person’s behavior is more salient than its context, so causality is attributed to the person. In addition, actors compared with observers have greater access to information about their own feelings with regard to an event, their intentions, and the consistency over past behaviors. Observers can only infer what they can from the immediate environment (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Together with the fact that others’ negative behaviors are generally more salient than

others' positive behaviors, the actor–observer effect may cause people to perceive others' negative behaviors as more stable and dispositional than others' positive behaviors.

These cognitive processes underlying biased self–other judgments seem likely in close relationships, because the individual knows the other party well and has considerable access to information about the other's features, traits and behaviors. When, however, the individual is less acquainted with the other, he or she may rely on other types of information to form a judgment. A considerable amount of research shows that in the absence of individuating information (for example, because of a lack of intensive contact with the other party), people rely on category-based information, such as race, sex and age, to form impressions and to make judgments (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). For example, gender role stereotyping occurs most often when perceptions of, rather than behavioral responses to, others' behavior are assessed and when short-term relationships of opposite-sex dyads are the focus (Keashly, 1994). Likewise, research by Locksley and colleagues (Locksley et al., 1982) has shown that when judging someone, people rely on gender role stereotypes to the extent that no individuating information is presented.

The above thus suggests that familiarity with the other person in a close relationship may facilitate biased self–other judgments and hinder gender role stereotyping. However, in some circumstances stereotypical beliefs point in the same direction as biased self–other judgments, while in other circumstances they do not. As noted, women are typically viewed as cooperative and relationship-oriented, whereas males are viewed as competitive and status-oriented (e.g. Keashly, 1994; Rubin & Brown, 1975; Schaap et al., 1988). Therefore, females judging their male opponent as less cooperative and more competitive than themselves may be subject to both biased self–other judgment or gender-based stereotypes. But a male judging his female opponent as less cooperative and as more competitive, displays a biased self–other judgment, and not a gender role stereotype.

To summarize, we argue that in intimate as opposed to non-intimate relationships there is (i) more 'cognitive input' for biased self–other judgments to occur so that this bias strengthens, and (ii) less reliance on category-based information when judging others, so that perceptions of and expectations about other's behavior will be influenced less by stereotypes. The present experiment employed a design that allowed for both bias in self–other judgments and gender role stereotypes. We asked male and female participants to rate both their own intention to cooperative and competitive conflict behavior and that of an opposite-sex opponent. We predicted biased self–other judgments: Participants rate themselves as intending more cooperative and less competitive behavior than their opponent (*Hypothesis 1*). We furthermore expected this to occur especially when the opponent was one's intimate partner. When participants did not know their opponent well (i.e. in non-intimate relationships), we predicted judgments to be based on gender role stereotypes: Females rate their male opponent as less cooperative and more competitive, whereas males rate

their female opponent as more cooperative and less competitive (*Hypothesis 2*).

Method

The design was a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ factorial, involving Sex of Participant (male vs female), Intimacy (intimate vs non-intimate) and Target of Judgment (self vs opposite-sex other). The last factor was manipulated within-subjects. The main dependent variable was the rated intention to cooperative and competitive conflict behavior.

Ninety-six undergraduate students (48 males and 48 females) at George Mason University volunteered to participate in the experiment. Participants' age was, on average, 23.06. Data of four participants were discarded because of missing values, leaving a total sample size of 92.

Data were collected in classrooms, with participants seated at reasonable distances from each other. Each participant received a questionnaire, describing a hypothetical conflict between themselves and an opposite-sex other (either the intimate partner or a classmate, see below). Participants were asked to carefully read the conflict case and were thereafter prompted to answer a series of questions as to how they themselves would act and as to how they expected the other to act. Upon completion of the questionnaire, participants were fully debriefed and dismissed.

Participants in the *Intimate condition* all had an intimate and steady relationship for at least 3 months. In this condition, the average duration of the intimate relationship was 3 years; 14 participants were married and an additional 2 were living together with their partner. Participants in the *Non-intimate condition* were asked to think of an opposite-sex classmate with whom they had no intimate or intense contact, and were subsequently interrogated about this particular classmate. Participants in this condition had known their classmate for one year on average. We adapted the statements in the questionnaire, including the conflict case, to make sure that participants in the Intimate condition reported about their intimate partner, whereas those in the Non-intimate condition reported about a classmate.

The conflict case we constructed for this experiment was, according to pilot data, as likely to occur in an intimate as in a non-intimate relationship. Participants in the Non-intimate condition read the following scenario (with changes for the Intimate condition in parentheses):

A fellow student (your partner) asked you to help complete a project for one of his/her classes. Although you had other plans for the day, you can spare some time and you promise to help your classmate (partner). When working together you get irritated by your classmate (partner), because he/she does not get to the point and takes too much time to get things done. You want to get this project done as efficiently as possible, since you had other things to do. Your classmate (partner) is irritated by the fact that you are rushing him/her. Your classmate (partner) wants to get the project done as well as possible and take all the time it needs. At the end of the day, the both of you are having a serious argument. You feel frustrated because your classmate (partner) took your time to work in an inefficient way. Your classmate (partner) feels frustrated because you're not willing to spend more time to work the way he/she wants.

To control for own and other's role in the conflict, half of the participants read

TABLE 1
Cooperative and competitive tactics

Cooperative tactics

- try to collaborate in each other's interests
- do something nice for the other
- invest in a good relationship with the other
- explain why a certain outcome is important to you
- listen to the other
- try to understand the other's perspective
- seek alternatives that satisfy both parties
- strive for a fair compromise

Competitive tactics

- show distrust
 - have a win-lose attitude
 - attempt to exploit the other
 - show no interest in the other's viewpoints
 - refuse to give up your initial position
 - make accusations
 - try to intimidate the other
 - want to be better than the other
-

the above conflict case, while the other half read a conflict case in which the roles were reversed. No main or interaction effects were found for the roles of self and other, $F_s < 1.38$, NS.

The main dependent variable was the intention to perform a specific conflict behavior. Table 1 lists the 16 tactics participants were asked to rate. Half of the tactics involved *cooperative* conflict behaviors and the other half involved *competitive* conflict behaviors. The tactics were presented in a random but otherwise fixed order and participants were unaware of the type of tactics. (The headings were not included in the original questionnaire.) Own cooperation and own competition were measured by asking participants to what extent they would use each tactic in the described conflict situation. Expected other's cooperation and expected other's competition were measured by asking participants to what extent they thought their partner/classmate would use each tactic in the conflict case described above. Seven-point scales were used for the rating of the tactics (1 = very little, to 7 = very much). The internal consistencies of the scales were good (Cronbach's alpha = .87 for own cooperation, alpha = .87 for other's cooperation, alpha = .89 for own competition, and alpha = .86 for other's competition). The own/other distinction constitutes the Target of Judgment variable. The order of presentation of own and other's behaviors was counterbalanced, but had no main or interaction effects, $F_s < 1.51$, NS. The cooperative/competitive distinction constitutes the Intention to Conflict Behavior variable.

Results

We asked participants two questions about the degree of intimacy of their relationship with the other. First, on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all intimate, to 7 = very intimate) participants rated the degree of intimacy of the relationship with their partner/classmate. A 2×2 (Sex of Participant $\times$ Intimacy) analysis

of variance, revealed a strong main effect for Intimacy, $F(1,88) = 230.02$, $p < .001$. Participants in the Intimate condition rated their intimate relationship as very intimate ($M = 6.35$, $SD = .85$), whereas participants in the Non-intimate condition rated the relationship with their classmate as not intimate ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 1.52$). The main effect for Sex of Participant and the interaction effect were not significant, $F_s < 1.45$, NS. Second, on a 7-point scale (1 = very little, to 7 = very much), participants in the Intimate condition indicated that they would describe their relationship as 'quite steady' ($M = 6.51$, $SD = .77$). On a 7-point scale (1 = very little, to 7 = very much), participants in the Non-intimate condition indicated that they would describe the relationship with their classmate as a 'friendship' to some extent ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.77$). Again, male and female participants did not differ significantly on this question in both conditions, $t_s < .65$, NS. These data, together with the fact that participants in Intimate condition knew their partner for a much longer period than participants in the Non-intimate condition, corroborate the successfulness of our manipulation.

We submitted the intention to cooperative and competitive conflict behavior data to two separate $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Sex of Participant $\times$ Intimacy $\times$ Target of Judgment) analyses of variance, with the last variable as repeated measures. For cooperative tactics, this analysis revealed a main effect for Target of Judgment, $F(1,88) = 7.73$, $p < .01$. As predicted in Hypothesis 1, participants indicated they would use cooperative tactics to a greater extent than the other party, $M = 5.53$ vs $M = 5.19$. For competitive tactics, the main effect for Target of Judgment was also significant, $F(1,88) = 3.98$, $p < .05$. Also in line with Hypothesis 1, participants indicated they would use competitive tactics to a lesser extent than the other party, $M = 2.83$ vs $M = 3.06$. For both cooperative and competitive tactics, the main effects for Intimacy and Sex of Participant were not significant, $F_s < .79$, NS. In addition, none of the two-way interactions was significant, $F_s < 1.99$, NS, except for the two-way interaction of Intimacy and Target of Judgment on cooperative tactics, $F(1,88) = 4.74$, $p < .05$. Participants in the Intimate condition indicated they would use cooperative tactics to a greater extent than the other party, $M = 5.73$ vs $M = 5.15$, $t(45) = 3.81$, $p < .001$, whereas in the Non-intimate condition, the difference between rated own and other's intention to cooperative tactics was not significant, $M = 5.32$ vs $M = 5.24$, $t(45) = .47$, NS. Overall, participants showed a stronger intention to perform cooperative behavior than competitive behavior, $M = 5.35$ vs $M = 2.93$, $t(88) = 161.01$, $p < .001$.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the three-way interaction between Sex of Participant, Intimacy and Target of Judgment was borderline significant for cooperative tactics, $F(1,88) = 3.66$, $p < .06$, and significant for competitive tactics, $F(1,88) = 8.03$, $p < .01$. To understand the nature of these two three-way interactions, we analyzed each by testing simple effects within levels of Intimacy, using the overall error terms. In the Intimate condition, the main effects of Sex of Participant and the interaction effects of Sex of Participant and Target of Judgment were not significant, $F_s(1,88) < 1.00$, NS, for cooperative tactics, and $F_s(1,88) < 1.00$, NS, for competitive tactics. This rules out gender role stereotyping. Consistent with biased self-other judgments, however, the main effects of Target of Judgment were significant, showing that participants intended to use cooperative tactics more, $F(1,88) = 7.74$, $p < .01$, and competitive tactics less, $F(1,88) = 3.98$, $p < .05$, than the other party (see Table 2).

A different pattern emerged in the Non-intimate condition. Simple effects

TABLE 2
Mean intention to conflict behavior as a function of Sex of Participant,
Intimacy and Target of Judgment

Target	Sex of participant			
	Male		Female	
	Self	Other	Self	Other
Intimate condition:				
Cooperative tactics	5.79 ^a (.86)	5.12 ^b (1.15)	5.67 ^a (.93)	5.18 ^b (1.40)
Competitive tactics	2.52 ^d (1.18)	3.08 ^c (1.53)	2.97 ^e (1.32)	3.17 ^c (1.68)
Non-intimate condition:				
Cooperative tactics	5.04 ^b (1.34)	5.33 ^{bc} (1.04)	5.58 ^a (.86)	5.16 ^{bc} (1.11)
Competitive tactics	3.24 ^c (1.04)	2.86 ^c (.93)	2.59 ^d (.75)	3.10 ^e (1.14)

Note: For both Tactics: 1 = very little, to 7 = very much. Means not sharing a superscript differ at $p < .05$ (for males in the Non-intimate condition, the self-other difference for competitive tactics is significant at $p < .10$). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

analyses revealed only significant interactions between Sex of Participant and Target of Judgment, $F(1,88) = 4.41$, $p < .05$, and $F(1,88) = 7.78$, $p < .01$. As shown in the lower part of Table 2, males intended to use less cooperative and more competitive tactics than their (female) opponent, whereas females intended to use more cooperative and less competitive tactics than their (male) opponent. This pattern of results is inconsistent with biased self-other judgments, but very much in line with gender role stereotypes.

All relevant comparisons between specific conditions were significant, except for the comparison of own and other's competition for females in the Intimate condition and the comparison of own and other's cooperation for males in the Non-intimate condition — the difference for competitive tactics was significant at $p < .10$. This may be because of a power problem or it may reflect a theoretical issue. That is, gender role stereotyping may have been counterbalanced by bias in self-other judgment. To summarize, as predicted, intimate relationships did not show gender role stereotyping, but rather revealed biased self-other judgments. In contrast, non-intimate relationships yielded data consistent with gender role stereotyping.

Another way of making the same point is to analyze the difference scores for cooperation and competition (i.e. ratings for Self minus ratings for Other). When self-other judgments are biased, the cooperation difference score should be positive, whereas the competition difference score should be negative. When self-other judgments are based on gender role stereotypes, the difference score for cooperation should be positive for female participants, but negative for male participants, whereas the reverse should be the case for the difference score for competition. A 2×2 (Sex of Participant $\times$ Intimacy) analysis of variance on the difference scores for cooperation and for competition revealed significant effects for the constant, showing that the overall means of the difference scores were both significantly different from zero, $F(1,88) = 7.73$, $p < .01$ for cooperation, and $F(1,88) = 3.98$, $p < .05$ for competition. This effect corroborates

Hypothesis 1 that participants perceive themselves as more cooperative and as less competitive than their opponent. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, the interaction effect of Intimacy and Sex of Participant was borderline significant for the difference score for cooperation, $F(1,88) = 3.66, p < .06$, and significant for the difference score for competition, $F(1,88) = 8.03, p < .01$.

Figure 1 gives a graphical display. In the Intimate condition, the cooperation difference score is positive, and the competition difference score is negative for

FIGURE 1
Mean difference score (Self minus Other) for cooperation and competition as a function of Sex of Participant and Intimacy.

both male and female participants. This is consistent with biased self–other judgment. In the Non-intimate condition, the difference score for cooperation is negative for male participants, but positive for female participants. The difference score for competition is positive for male, and negative for female participants. This is consistent with gender role stereotypes.

Conclusions and discussion

The present research explored self–other bias as a cognitive process that may contribute to conflict escalation in close relationships. We tested the prediction that parties involved in interpersonal conflict perceive themselves as more cooperative and as less competitive than their opponent and we expected to find this particularly in intimate as opposed to non-intimate relationships. Furthermore, we expected judgments of opposite-sex conflict parties in non-intimate relationships to be based on gender role stereotypes: Females would judge male others as less cooperative and more competitive, whereas males would judge their female opponents as more cooperative and less competitive.

The results support our predictions. In general, both males and females indicated that they would use cooperative tactics to a greater extent and competitive tactics to a lesser extent than their opposite-sex opponent. Moreover, in support of our expectations, this appeared to occur especially between intimate partners, whereas gender role stereotyping seemed to overrule biased self–other judgments between conflict parties in non-intimate relationships. In intimate relationships, individuals perceived themselves as more cooperative and less competitive than their partner. In contrast, males in non-intimate relationships tended to perceive themselves as less cooperative and as more competitive than their female opponent, while the reverse occurred for females.

Our findings contribute to the literature on conflict in close relationships by showing that intimate partners may exhibit biased self–other judgments. Such bias may play a role in the escalation of conflict in intimate relationships. This is particularly relevant for research on distressed couples. Distressed spouses are less likely to give their partners the benefit of the doubt and are more likely to evaluate their partners' behaviors in negative ways (Holmes & Boon, 1990). A related finding is that distressed couples are more likely to show the actor–observer effect: They are more likely to attribute their partners' behaviors to stable, dispositional factors and offer attributions that accentuate the impact of negative events and diminish the impact of positive events (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Bradbury & Fincham (1992) showed that partner's maladaptive attributions were related to less effective problem-solving behaviors and higher rates of negative behaviors, especially among distressed couples. Distressed couples tend to diminish the value of their partner's positive behaviors and accentuate their partner's negative behaviors in a way that maintains their feelings of distress (Holmes & Boon, 1990). Hence, distressed couples seem especially prone to biased self–other judgments. By contrast, happy couples tend to distort their appraisal of their

relationship in positive ways, which has been found to relate to increases in satisfaction and decreases in conflict (Murray et al., 1996). They may thus be somewhat 'immune' to biased self-other judgments. An interesting and important topic, pointed out by a reviewer, is the suggestion of testing these propositions among a sample of distressed and non-distressed couples.

The present results expand the literature on biased self-other judgments, as well as prior findings concerning gender role stereotyping. As to the first, our research indicates that bias in self-other judgment may particularly pertain to situations in which a relatively well-known other is judged. This is noteworthy, because in prior research, participants were asked to compare themselves with an otherwise unspecified 'average other'. An important and interesting question awaiting further research is to see whether people asked to compare themselves with an 'average other' in fact construe an image of this 'average other' based on quite well-known others with whom they have a relatively intimate relationship. Our data also show something about the conditions eliciting gender role stereotyping. Consistent with previous research (Locksley et al., 1982) and theory (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), our experiment shows that in close relationships, the effects of gender role stereotypes are diluted. This finding bolsters the reliability as well as the validity of this prior research. We relied on a different methodology than other stereotyping research. In this experiment, people thought about the intimate partner vs a non-intimate other, rather than being presented with category information or both category and individuating information.

We believe the current findings to be important for practical reasons. As this study shows, males and females display a similar self-other bias with regard to cooperation and competition towards their intimate partner. Romantic couples that encounter severe marital problems could be taught to become aware of biased self-other judgments. When partners recognize the bias in their own and their partners' judgments, they may be able to translate their behavior into more constructive modes of behavior. For example, when both partners believe they show more cooperative and less competitive behavior than the other, both will expect the other to take the first step and cooperate. However, when partners are aware of their own and their partner's biased perceptions, they may be more inclined to initiate constructive behaviors and resolve the conflict.

Another practical implication concerns conflict between non-intimate parties. Prior research on biased self-other judgment focused mainly on male dyads (i.e. students, employees, professional negotiators). However, the number of women employed in business firms and organizations is growing. This makes knowledge about perceptions of conflict resolution in opposite-sex non-intimate dyads becoming increasingly important. Hence, the knowledge about gender role stereotyping in social conflict that is generated by the present study may be applied to conflict management training and mediator intervention. For example, the findings can be used to suggest that gender role stereotypes may be misleading and provide only a preliminary basis of information about opposite sex others, which will fade as we obtain more information about the other person. As our brief

review at the outset of this paper indicates, research has shown that men and women do not consistently behave in ways indicated by traditional gender role stereotypes (Cupach & Canary, 1995).

A few limitations to this research require mention. First of all, one may have doubts about the typicality of the induction in intimate relationships and whether the situation in which the intimate partner asks the participant for help on a task, or vice versa, is realistic. We did not gather information about the status of the partner (student, employee, etc.) or about the typicality of the scenario. However, all participants were students and we may assume that many of their partners were college students also, or had been in the past. Moreover, we did not find any effects for the roles of self and other. In addition, we used only one scenario, which may have confounded the induction. Further research is needed to see whether our findings generalize to other situations that concern, for example, more personal or social conflicts. Second, we only collected data about the perceptions of the actor. We would like to emphasize that we studied biased perceptions of conflict behavior rather than actual conflict behavior, and we merely needed data on individuals' perceptions of their own and their opponent's (intended) behavior to test our hypotheses. However, it would be interesting to examine both actor and opponent/partner perceptions of the same conflict situation. Finally, the competitive tactics in our study were rather harsh and negative, and future research should test our hypotheses using mildly competitive tactics. However, the nature of the tactics is independent of an accurate test of our hypotheses. Rather than comparing cooperative and competitive tactics, our hypotheses addressed the comparison of self and other for competitive and for cooperative tactics. The fact that participants in some conditions see themselves as more competitive than their opponent is even more surprising in light of the fact that we used harsh competitive tactics. We believe that using mildly competitive tactics would only lead to stronger effects.

A final point we wish to consider is what specific effects biased self-other judgments in close relationships have. As mentioned in the introduction, research (De Dreu et al., 1995) indicates that the bias is associated with conflict escalation, stalemate and future conflict, all processes that are detrimental to close relationships. Other researchers argue, however, that cognitive illusions and bias may have quite positive effects on well-being, including physical health (e.g. Taylor & Brown, 1988). This apparent contradiction may be resolved by asking whether the comparison is made at the individual level (self vs partner) or at group level (own vs other's intimate relationship; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). Bias at the group level may have positive effects, while bias at the individual level associates with rather destructive processes and outcomes.

REFERENCES

- Bettencourt, B.A. & Miller, N. (1996) 'Sex Differences in Aggression as a Function of Provocation', *Psychological Bulletin* 119: 422-47.

- Bradbury, T.N. & Fincham, F.D. (1990) 'Attributions in Marriage: Review and Critique', *Psychological Bulletin* 107: 3–33.
- Bradbury, T.N. & Fincham, F.D. (1992) 'Attributions and Behavior in Marital Interaction', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 63: 613–28.
- Canary, D.J., Cupach, W.R. & Messman, S.J. (1995) *Relationship Conflict*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Christensen, A. & Heavey, C.L. (1990) 'Gender and Social Structure in the Demand/Withdraw Pattern of Marital Conflict', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 59: 73–81.
- Christensen, A. & Schenk, J.L. (1991) 'Communication, Conflict, and Psychological Distance in Nondistressed, Clinic, and Divorcing Couples', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 59: 458–63.
- Cupach, W.R. & Canary, D.J. (1995) 'Managing Conflict and Anger: Investigating the Sex Stereotype Hypothesis', in P. Kalbfleisch & M.J. Cody (Eds) *Gender, Power, and Communication in Human Relationships*, pp. 233–52. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- De Dreu, C.K.W., Nauta, A. & Van de Vliert, E. (1995) 'Self-serving Evaluations of Conflict Behavior and Escalation of the Dispute', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 25: 2049–66.
- Fiske, S.T. & Neuberg, S.L. (1990) 'A Continuum of Impression Formation, from Category-Based to Individuating Processes: Influences of Information and Motivation on Attention and Interpretation', in M.P. Zanna (Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, pp. 7–74. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Fiske, S.T. & Taylor, S.E. (1991) *Social Cognition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Gayle, B.M., Preiss, R.W. & Allen, M. (1994) 'Gender Differences and the Use of Conflict Strategies', in L.H. Turner & H.M. Sterk (Eds) *Differences That Make a Difference: Examining the Assumptions in Gender Research*, pp. 13–26. Westport, CT: Bergen & Garvey.
- Holmes, J.G. & Boon, S.D. (1990) 'Developments in the Field of Close Relationships: Creating Foundations for Intervention Strategies', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 16: 23–41.
- Holmes, J.G. & Murray, S.L. (1996) 'Conflict in Close Relationships', in E.T. Higgins & A.W. Kruglanski (Eds) *Social Psychology: Handbook of Basic Principles*, pp. 622–54. New York: Guilford.
- Hoorens, V. (1993) 'Self-enhancement and Superiority Biases in Social Comparison', in W. Stroebe & M. Hewstone (Eds) *European Review of Social Psychology*, 4. Chichester: Wiley.
- Keashly, L. (1994) 'Gender and Conflict: What Does Psychological Research Tell Us?', in A. Taylor & J. Beinstein Miller (Eds) *Conflict and Gender*, pp. 167–90. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Kluwer, E.S., Heesink, J.A.M. & Van de Vliert, E. (1997) 'The Marital Dynamics of Conflict over the Division of Labor', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 59: 635–53.
- Kramer, R.M., Newton, E. & Pommerenke, P.L. (1993) 'Self-enhancement Biases and Negotiator Judgment: Effects of Self-esteem and Mood', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 56: 110–33.
- Krone, K.J., Allen, M. & Ludlum, J. (1994) 'A Meta-analysis of Gender Research in Managerial Influence', in L.H. Turner & H.M. Sterk (Eds) *Differences That Make a Difference: Examining the Assumption in Gender Research*, pp. 73–84. Westport, CT: Bergen & Garvey.
- Locksley, A., Hepburn, C. & Ortiz, V. (1982) 'Sex Stereotypes and Social Judgment', *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 18: 23–42.
- Murray, S.L., Holmes, J.G. & Griffin, D.W. (1996) 'The Self-fulfilling Nature of Positive Illusions in Romantic Relationships: Love Is Not Blind, but Prescient', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71: 1155–80.
- Rubin, J.Z. & Brown, B.R. (1975) *The Social Psychology of Bargaining and Negotiation*. New York: Academic Press.

- Schaap, C., Buunk, B.P. & Kerkstra, A. (1988) 'Marital Conflict Resolution', in P. Noller & M.A. Fitzpatrick (Eds) *Perspectives on Marital Interaction*, pp. 203–44. Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters.
- Taylor, S.E. (1991). 'Asymmetrical Effects of Positive and Negative Events: The Mobilization–Minimization Hypothesis', *Psychological Bulletin* 110: 67–85.
- Taylor, S.E. & Brown, J.D. (1988). 'Illusion and Well-being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health', *Psychological Bulletin* 103: 193–210.
- Van Lange, P.A.M. & Rusbult, C.E. (1995) 'My Relationship Is Better Than — and Not as Bad as — Yours Is: The Perception of Superiority in Close Relationships', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 21: 32–44.