Activity, Passivity, Self-Denigration, and Self-Promotion: Toward an Interactionist Model of Interpersonal Dependency

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ABSTRACT Although dependency in adults is inextricably linked with passivity and submissiveness in the minds of many theoreticians, clinicians, and researchers, evidence has accumulated which suggests that in certain situations, dependency is actually associated with high levels of activity and assertiveness. Three experiments were conducted to test the hypothesis that when a dependent person is concerned primarily with getting along with a peer, he or she will "self-denigrate" (i.e., will utilize strategies that ensure that a peer will be evaluated more positively than he or she is on a laboratory task), but when a dependent person is concerned primarily with pleasing an authority figure, he or she will "self-promote" (i.e., will adopt strategies that increase the likelihood that he or she will be evaluated more positively than a peer on a laboratory task). This hypothesis was supported in all three experiments. Theoretical implications of these findings are discussed, and an interactionist model of interpersonal dependency is briefly described.

Theoreticians, clinicians, and researchers have long observed that certain people have a strong inclination to look to others for support, guidance, and reassurance, even in situations where they seem capable of initiating and completing tasks on their own. Such persons have traditionally been thought of as having a "dependent personality" (Bornstein, 1992). During the past several decades researchers have attempted...

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to delineate the constellation of traits associated with high levels of interpersonal dependency in children and adults (Birtchnell, 1984, 1988; Hirschfeld et al., 1977; Kline & Storey, 1977; Millon, 1981). In addition, recent studies have examined the relationships between dependency and constructs such as sociotropy (Beck, Epstein, Harrison, & Emery, 1983), and Blatt's (1974) concept of an "anaclitic personality." These investigations indicate that the construct of dependency has much in common—both conceptually and empirically—with these two constructs (Bornstein, 1995).

Other recent studies have investigated the place of dependency within the five-factor model of personality (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1990; Shopshire & Craik, 1994). These investigations have generally found positive correlations between people's dependency scores and their scores of measures of Neuroticism and Agreeableness, and negative correlations between people's dependency scores and their scores on measures of Extraversion. Taken together, factor-analytic and cluster-analytic investigations, studies of the relationship of dependency to sociotropy and anaclitic traits, and studies examining dependency in the context of the five-factor model converge to indicate that the dependent individual (a) has a strong tendency to rely on others for nurturance, guidance, and support; and (b) feels anxious and insecure in social situations and in situations when he or she is being evaluated by others (Bornstein, 1992, 1995).

Although different definitions of dependency emphasize different aspects of the dependent person's functioning and interpersonal behavior, these definitions share many common elements. Bornstein (1993) concluded that dependency is best conceptualized as consisting of four separate but related components: (a) motivational (i.e., a marked need for guidance, approval, and support from others); (b) cognitive (i.e., a perception of the self as powerless and ineffectual, along with the belief that others are powerful and in control of the outcome of situations); (c) affective (i.e., a tendency to become anxious and fearful when required to function independently, especially when the products of one's efforts will be evaluated by others); and (d) behavioral (i.e., a tendency to seek help, approval, guidance, and reassurance from others). Research in this area suggests that dependency is best understood as a personality orientation wherein cognitive, motivational, and affective tendencies interact to determine the behavior of the dependent person in various situations and settings (Bornstein, 1993, 1995).
Studies examining the correlates and consequences of dependent personality traits in children and adults have demonstrated that dependency has important implications for a number of psychological phenomena. For example, level of dependency predicts risk for psychopathology (Masling & Schwartz, 1979) and risk for physical illness (Bornstein, Krukonis, Manning, Mastrosimone, & Rossner, 1993) in normal and clinical populations. Dependency also affects people's interpersonal perceptions and behaviors, both in dyads and in larger social groups (Bornstein, Masling, & Poynton, 1987). Moreover, dependency is an important predictor of various patient-related behaviors exhibited in medical settings (e.g., cooperativeness and compliance during treatment; Greenberg & Bornstein, 1989). Dependency also predicts interpersonal and achievement-related behavior in academic settings for elementary school (Sroufe, Fox, & Pancake, 1983) and high-school students (Bornstein & Kennedy, 1994).

Findings from clinical, social, and developmental studies converge to suggest that in general, high levels of dependency are associated with compliance, suggestibility, and help-seeking on the part of the dependent person. In fact, dependency has become so strongly associated with submissiveness and helplessness that in the minds of many clinicians and researchers, dependency and passivity are inextricably linked (see Ainsworth, 1969; Masling, 1986; Millon, 1981). The dependency-passivity link was first discussed in detail by early psychoanalytic theorists (e.g., Abraham, 1927; Fenichel, 1945; Glover, 1925), although this relationship was later elaborated in successive revisions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM-IV (APA, 1994) description of individuals with Dependent Personality Disorder (DPD) illustrates the dependency-passivity link as conceptualized by members of the mental health community. According to the DSM-IV (APA, 1994), individuals with DPD show "a pervasive and excessive need to be taken care of that leads to submissive and clinging behavior and fears of separation... The dependent and submissive behaviors are designed to elicit caregiving and arise from a self-perception of being unable to function adequately without the help of others" (p. 665).

Recent theoretical discussions of the etiology and dynamics of dependent personality traits have continued to emphasize the passive, submissive qualities of dependent persons (Birtchnell, 1984, 1988; Blatt, Quinlan, Chevron, McDonald, & Zuroff, 1982; Livesley, Schroeder, & Jackson, 1990). Perhaps the best general description of the depen-
dent individual was provided by Millon (1981), who contended that dependent persons

adapt their behavior to please those upon who they depend. . . . They avoid asserting themselves lest their actions be seen as aggressive. . . . [D]ependents quickly submit and comply with what others wish, [and] are noticeably self-effacing, obsequious, ever-agreeable, docile and ingratiating. . . . They avoid displaying initiative and self-determination. . . . Paralyzed and empty if left on their own, they feel the need for guidance in fulfilling even simple tasks or making routine decisions. (pp. 107-108)

Echoing Millon's view, McLemore and Brokaw (1987) noted that dependent persons "[convey] a message of weakness and invalidism in order to maintain their passive role. . . . [T]he dependent person's primary interpersonal 'reflex' consists of docile conformity to others" (pp. 281-282).

Although dependency is strongly associated with passivity and submissiveness in the minds of many clinicians and researchers, a careful review of the empirical literature reveals that dependency is not invariably associated with these behaviors. For example, several investigations (e.g., Sears, 1963; Sroufe et al., 1983; Wiggins & Winder, 1961) found that dependent schoolchildren showed a number of assertive attention-demanding behaviors in the classroom (e.g., showing exaggerated signs of frustration in challenging situations in an attempt to obtain help from the teacher). Similar findings have emerged in studies of help-seeking in adults. Specifically, several investigations (e.g., Diener, 1967; Shilkret & Masling, 1981; Sinha & Pandey, 1972) found that dependent participants actively sought help and reassurance from the experimenter more frequently than nondependent participants during laboratory problem-solving tasks.

Studies of dependent persons in clinical settings offer further evidence that dependent individuals sometimes behave in an active, assertive manner rather than in a passive, submissive manner. For example, research indicates that dependent persons tend to seek medical help more quickly than nondependent persons when physical symptoms appear (Brown & Rawlinson, 1975; Greenberg & Fisher, 1977). In addition, studies confirm that dependent individuals utilize medical and psychological services significantly more often than nondependent individuals, even when overall level of pathology is controlled for statistically (Greenberg & Bornstein, 1989).
The strongest evidence suggesting that situational variables play a key role in determining whether a dependent person will behave in a passive, submissive manner or an active, assertive manner comes from studies of conformity and interpersonal yielding. Two experiments assessed the dependency-yielding relationship using an Asch (1956) conformity paradigm. First, Kagan and Mussen (1956) found that high Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) dependency scores were associated with increased yielding to the majority opinion in an experiment in which male participants made judgments regarding the length of lines, with confederate participants providing erroneous opinions before the actual participant offered his judgment. Similarly, Masling, Weiss, and Rothschild (1968) found that dependent male participants were more likely than nondependent participants to acquiesce to the opinions of confederates in a modified Asch-type conformity experiment.

One study in this area (Bornstein et al., 1987) obtained the opposite results (i.e., an inverse relationship between dependency and yielding). In this experiment, dyads consisting of one dependent and one nondependent participant were asked to reach a consensus decision regarding a topic on which they had previously disagreed. Contrary to expectations, Bornstein et al. found that the dependent participants were significantly less likely than the nondependent participants to change their initial opinions. Postexperiment interviews revealed that the dependent participants were particularly concerned with making a good impression on the experimenter. When choosing between impressing an authority figure (the experimenter) or getting along with a peer (the other participant), the dependent participants in Bornstein et al.’s study opted to stand by their initial opinions and thereby impress the experimenter.

The results obtained by Masling et al. (1968) and Bornstein et al. (1987) have two important implications for understanding the interpersonal dynamics of dependency. First, these findings suggest that pleasing authority figures is more important to the dependent person than getting along with peers. This conclusion is not surprising when one considers that authority figures (e.g., physicians, employers, professors, supervisors, therapists) are typically in a better position than peers to provide the protection, guidance, and support that the dependent person seeks.

Second, these results suggest that the passive, submissive behavior often exhibited by the dependent person is not simply an involuntary, automatic "interpersonal reflex," as McLemore and Brokaw (1987) ar-
gued. Rather, the dependent person's passivity appears to represent a kind of self-presentation strategy designed to strengthen relationships with potential nurturers and caretakers. Thus, when the dependent person's primary goal is to get along with a peer, he or she will engage in behaviors that permit the peer to obtain a position of dominance. In contrast, when the dependent person's primary goal is to impress an authority figure, the dependent person will engage in behaviors that increase the likelihood that he or she will compete effectively with a peer. Put another way, if getting along with peers is the most salient concern for dependent people, then in situations when their performance is being compared to that of a peer, they should "self-denigrate," behaving in such a way as to ensure that the peer will be evaluated more positively than they are. However, when wanting to please an authority figure, dependent people should choose to "self-promote," adopting strategies that increase the likelihood that they will perform better than the peer against whom their performance is being compared.

Although considerable indirect evidence has accumulated that indicates that situational variables play a key role in determining whether a dependent person will behave in a passive, submissive manner or in an active, assertive manner, this issue has never been examined directly. The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that in situations where the dependent person's performance is being compared to that of a peer, the presence (or absence) of an authority figure will significantly and predictably influence the dependent person's behavior. Specifically, in a situation where no authority figure is present, the dependent person should engage in various self-denigration strategies that ensure that the peer will perform better than he or she does. However, in a similar situation where an authority figure is evaluating their performance, dependent people should engage in various self-promotion strategies that ensure that they will perform better than the peer and thereby impress the authority figure.

**Experiment 1**

In Experiment 1, pairs of male participants who had been prescreened for dependency level were brought to the laboratory, separated, and asked to complete brief "creativity tests" after we informed them that we expected them to obtain similar scores on these tests. Half the participants were told that two psychology professors would be examining
their creativity tests. The remaining participants were told that no one would have access to their test results.

Participants were given two opportunities to utilize strategies that they believed would enhance or undermine their performance on the creativity tests. First, they were allowed to complete practice items similar to those that would appear on the test, after having been told that this might improve their test performance. Second, they were asked to choose the type of background music that they wanted to listen to while completing the creativity test, after having been informed that certain musical selections enhanced test performance whereas other selections inhibited test performance.

After completing the creativity tests, participants made four 9-point ratings of their motivations during the testing session. Participants were asked to rate (a) how hard they worked on the test (hereafter referred to as the "hard work" rating); (b) how important it was for them to get along well with the other participant (the "get along" rating); (c) how important it was for them to impress the experimenter (the "impress experimenter" rating); and (d) how important it was for them to impress the professors (the "impress professor" rating).

We hypothesized that level of dependency and presence versus absence of an authority figure would interact to determine participants' self-denigration/self-promotion strategies. Specifically, we predicted that dependent participants in the no authority condition would do few practice items, spend relatively little time practicing, and select background music that they believed would inhibit their test performance, whereas dependent participants in the authority condition would do a relatively large number of practice items, spend more time practicing, and select music that they believed would enhance their test performance. Nondependent participants' behavior should be unaffected by the presence versus absence of an authority figure.

Thus, we hypothesized that there would be a Level of Dependency × Authority Condition interaction for participants' practice scores: Dependent participants in the authority condition should produce significantly higher practice scores than dependent participants in the no authority condition, but there should be no difference in the practice scores produced by nondependent participants in the authority versus no authority conditions. We further hypothesized that there would be a Level of Dependency × Authority Condition interaction for participants' music selections: Dependent participants in the authority con-
dition should choose music that they believed would enhance their test performance, whereas dependent participants in the no authority condition should choose music that they believed would inhibit their performance. There should be no difference in the type of music chosen by nondependent participants as a function of condition.

With respect to participants’ post-session ratings, we hypothesized that there would be a main effect of level of dependency on “hard work,” “get along,” and “impress experimenter” ratings, with dependent participants providing higher ratings than nondependent participants on each of these dimensions. For “impress professor” ratings, we hypothesized that there would be main effects of level of dependency and authority condition, as well as a Level of Dependency × Authority Condition interaction. Overall, dependent participants should produce higher “impress professor” ratings than nondependent participants, and participants in the authority condition should produce higher ratings than those in the no authority condition. The difference in dependent participants’ “impress professor” ratings in the authority versus no authority conditions should be greater than the difference in nondependent participants’ ratings on this dimension.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 60 male undergraduates enrolled in general psychology classes at Gettysburg College. Students received course credit for participating in the dependency prescreening, and were paid $5 for participating in the study proper.

Materials and Measures

Level of dependency was assessed using Hirschfeld et al.’s (1977) Interpersonal Dependency Inventory (IDI). The IDI has been one of the most widely used self-report measures of dependency during the past two decades (Bornstein, 1994). It is a 48-item questionnaire consisting of a series of dependency-related self-statements, each of which is rated by the participant on a 4-point scale anchored with the terms “Agree” (4) and “Disagree” (1). Hirschfeld et al.’s (1977) factor analysis of IDI items revealed that these 48 items form three subscales: (a) Emotional Reliance on Others (ER; 18 items); (b) Lack of Self-Confidence (LS; 16 items); and (c) Assertion of Autonomy (AA; 14 items). IDI scores were calculated by summing each participant’s scores on
the ER and LS subscales and subtracting from this total the participant’s score on the AA subscale. A detailed discussion of the construct validity of the IDI as a measure of interpersonal dependency is provided by Bornstein (1994).

The “creativity test” used in this experiment was a booklet containing 10 items from the Creativity Subtest of the Purdue Personnel Test (Lawshe & Harris, 1957). Each creativity test item was on a separate page and consisted of a simple line drawing depicting an imaginary object. At the top of each page, the following instructions were printed: “List as many possible uses as you can for this object. Number each possibility.”

The musical selections for this experiment consisted of five cassette tapes that had been coded with varying numbers of colored dots. Tapes were always presented to participants in the same order, with the first (left-hand) tape having two red dots, the second tape having one red dot, the third tape having no dots, the fourth tape having one green dot, and the fifth tape having two green dots. Participants were told that the tapes with red dots inhibited creativity test performance, whereas the tapes with green dots facilitated creativity test performance. In addition, participants were told that the five tapes formed a continuum with respect to their effects on creativity test performance, and that as one moved from left to right, the tapes were decreasingly inhibitory and increasingly facilitatory. In reality, all five tapes contained the same 10-minute excerpt of classical music. A “music selection score” was determined for each participant (the participant received a score of 1 if he selected the most inhibiting tape, 2 if he selected the next most inhibiting tape, etc.). Thus, these scores had a potential range of 1 to 5, with 1 being most inhibiting and 5 being most enhancing.

The post-session questionnaire used in Experiment 1 was a one-page form containing the following four questions: (a) “How hard did you work at the creativity task used in this study?” (b) “How important was it for you to get along well with the other subject in the study?” (c) “How important was it for you to impress the experimenter in this study?” (d) “How important was it for you to impress the professors who will be reviewing some subjects’ performance in this study when the study is completed?” Below each question was a 9-point Likert scale. The rating scale for the “hard work” question was anchored with the terms “Not very hard” (1) and “Very hard” (9). The other three rating scales were anchored with the terms “Not at all important” (1) and “Very important” (9).

Procedure

In the first part of the experiment, groups of 10 to 15 participants were prescreened for level of dependency using Hirschfeld et al.’s (1977) IDI. Participants were told that they were taking part in a study of personality and creativity, and that they might be called back to participate in a follow-up
session later in the semester. Approximately 120 students participated in the prescreening sessions. When all the students had been prescreened, they were divided into dependent and nondependent groups using a median split. Several weeks after the prescreening, students were contacted by phone and asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up session. Recruitment continued until 30 pairs of participants had been created, with each pair consisting of one dependent and one nondependent participant.

When participants arrived at the laboratory for the second experimental session, they were informed that this part of the study involved pilot testing a new creativity test that two professors in the psychology department were developing. Participants were told that based on their scores on the prescreening measure they were expected to obtain very similar scores on the creativity test. Half of the participants were then told that the two psychology professors developing the creativity test (one female professor and one male professor) would be examining their test protocols and might contact them later in the semester to go over their test results with them in person. The remaining participants were told that no one would have access to their test results. All participants were informed that after the creativity tests were completed and scored, they and the participant they were paired with would meet to review and compare their test results.

Participants were then taken to separate rooms to complete the creativity tests. At this point, each participant was given the opportunity to complete practice items similar to those that would appear on the test. Each participant was given a practice booklet containing 10 abstract figures (one figure per page). Instructions printed on the practice booklets were identical to those printed on the creativity tests themselves. Each participant was allowed to take as long as he wanted to do the practice items. The experimenter covertly recorded the amount of time (in seconds) that the participant spent practicing. At the end of the practice session, participants' practice booklets were collected by the experimenter so that the number of items completed by each participant could be determined later.

Participants were then asked to choose the type of background music they wanted to listen to while completing the creativity test. The experimenter recorded the participant's selection and handed him the test booklet, which contained 10 new figures (one per page). The participant was told that he would have 10 minutes to complete the creativity test. The experimenter then started the cassette tape that the participant had selected and told the participant to begin the test. After 10 minutes, the experimenter collected the participant's test and handed him the post-session rating form. After both participants had completed their rating forms, they were reunited, debriefed, and paid.
RESULTS

Preliminary Data

The mean IDI score for the entire sample was 46.00 (SD = 14.76, range = 14 to 91). The mean IDI score for nondependent participants (n = 30) was 34.17 (SD = 8.21), whereas the mean IDI score for dependent participants (n = 30) was 57.83 (SD = 9.30). There was a strong positive correlation between the number of practice items completed and the amount of time spent practicing for the creativity test, r(58) = .19, p < .001. The correlations between participants’ music selection scores and their creativity test practice scores were as follows: r(58) = .31 (p < .02) for number of practice items done, and r(58) = .22 (p < .10) for amount of time spent practicing.

A 2 X 2 (Level of Dependency x Authority Condition) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that level of dependency and authority condition had no effect on the number of creativity test items completed (all Fs < 1.00). Correlations between number of test items completed and participants’ post-session ratings ranged from .03 to .19. Correlations between number of test items completed and number of practice items done, amount of time spent practicing for the test, and music selection scores ranged from −.10 to .14.

Self-Denigration/Self-Promotion Results

The effects of level of dependency (dependent vs. nondependent) and authority condition (authority vs. no authority) on the number of test items completed during the practice sessions are summarized in Figure 1. As Figure 1 shows, there was a main effect of authority condition on number of practice items completed, with participants in the authority condition completing significantly more practice items than participants in the no authority condition, F(1, 56) = 11.83, p < .005. There was also a Level of Dependency x Authority Condition interaction for these data, F(1, 56) = 10.25, p < .005. Follow-up t tests confirmed that dependent participants in the authority condition completed significantly more practice items than dependent participants in the no authority condition, t(28) = 3.17, p < .005. However, as predicted, the number of practice items completed by nondependent participants in these two conditions did not differ, t(28) = 0.76, ns.

Highly similar results were obtained for the amount of time that participants spent practicing for the creativity test. Again, there was
a main effect of authority condition on the amount of time spent practicing, with participants in the authority condition spending significantly more time practicing than participants in the no authority condition, $F(1, 56) = 4.19, p < .05$. There was also a significant Level of Dependency $\times$ Authority Condition interaction for these data, $F(1, 56) = 4.92, p < .05$. Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that dependent participants in the authority condition spent significantly more time practicing than dependent participants in the no authority condition, $t(28) = 2.40, p < .05$. As expected, the amount of time that non-
dependent participants spent practicing did not differ as a function of authority condition, \( t(28) = 0.99, \text{ns} \).

Similar results were also obtained when the effects of level of dependency and authority condition on participants' music selections were assessed. As was the case for practice scores, there was a significant main effect of authority condition on participants' music selection scores, \( F(1, 56) = 10.56, p < .005 \). Participants in the authority condition selected more enhancing music than those in the no authority condition. There was also a significant Level of Dependency \( \times \) Authority Condition interaction for these data, \( F(1, 56) = 9.58, p < .005 \). Follow-up \( t \) tests indicated that the type of music selected by dependent participants in the authority condition differed significantly from the type of music selected by dependent participants in the no authority condition, \( t(28) = 2.93, p < .01 \): Dependent participants in the authority condition selected more enhancing music than those in the no authority condition. As predicted, the type of music selected by non-dependent participants did not vary as a function of authority condition, \( t(28) = 1.07, \text{ns} \).

**Post-Session Ratings**

The intercorrelations between participants' post-session ratings ranged from .17 (for "get along" and "impress professor" ratings) to .46 (for "impress experimenter" and "impress professor" ratings), with a mean post-session rating intercorrelation of .29. A 2 \( \times \) 2 (Level of Dependency \( \times \) Authority Condition) ANOVA revealed a main effect of level of dependency on participants' "hard work" ratings, with dependent participants providing significantly higher ratings than nondependent ones, \( F(1, 56) = 6.82, p < .02 \). The mean "hard work" rating assigned by dependent participants was 6.70 (SD = 1.21), whereas the mean rating assigned by nondependent participants was 5.67 (SD = 1.70). There were no other main effects or interactions involving these ratings (all \( Fs < 2.40 \)).

Similar results were obtained for participants' "get along" ratings. Again, there was a main effect of level of dependency on these ratings, with dependent participants providing significantly higher ratings than nondependent ones, \( F(1, 56) = 33.12, p < .0001 \). The mean "get along" rating assigned by dependent participants was 5.98 (SD = 1.86), whereas the mean rating assigned by nondependent participants was
3.05 ($SD = 2.05$). There were no other main effects or interactions for these ratings, and no significant main effects or interactions involving participants' "impress experimenter" ratings (all $Fs < 1.40$).

Figure 2 summarizes the effects of level of dependency and authority condition on participants' "impress professor" ratings. There were main effects of level of dependency and authority condition on these ratings, $F(1, 56) = 9.10, p < .01$, for level of dependency, and $F(1, 56) = 28.16, p < .0001$, for authority condition. As Figure 2 shows, dependent participants provided significantly higher "impress professor" ratings than nondependent participants, and those in the
authority condition provided significantly higher ratings than those in the no authority condition. There was also a Level of Dependency × Authority Condition interaction for these ratings, $F(1, 56) = 11.33, p < .005$: Although both dependent and nondependent participants provided higher ratings in the authority condition than in the no authority condition, the difference in ratings across these two conditions was greater for dependent than nondependent participants.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of Experiment 1 suggest that when dependent persons are in a situation where their performance is being compared to that of a peer, they will engage in behaviors that undermine their performance if no authority figure is present, but will engage in behaviors that enhance their performance if they believe that an authority figure will be evaluating their performance at some later date. As predicted, level of dependency and authority condition interacted to predict the number of practice items completed, the amount of time spent practicing for the creativity test, and the type of background music selected for the test. Moreover, dependent, but not nondependent participants, altered their behavior in response to the presence versus absence of an authority figure.

Three of four hypotheses regarding participants' post-session ratings were confirmed in Experiment 1. Specifically, dependent participants reported working harder on the creativity test than nondependent participants and reported being more concerned with getting along with their peers. As expected, dependent participants also reported greater concern with impressing an authority figure than nondependent participants, and their self-reports of concern in this area were more strongly affected by the presence versus absence of an authority figure than were the self-reports of nondependent participants. This suggests that dependent individuals are more sensitive than nondependent individuals to the presence of persons in the environment (in this case, professors) who might be able to offer help, guidance, and support in the future.

The only hypothesis that was not confirmed in Experiment 1 involved participants' "impress experimenter" ratings. Although we had expected that dependent participants would provide higher ratings than nondependent participants on this dimension, there was no effect of level of dependency on these ratings. It may be that dependent participants were so concerned with strengthening their relationship with their
peers (in the no authority condition) or the unseen professors (in the authority condition) that they did not focus on how they were being perceived by the experimenter. In any case, the pattern of results obtained for these ratings was in the predicted direction, with dependent participants’ ratings ($X = 4.12$) being somewhat higher than nondependent participants’ ratings ($X = 3.52$).

The findings obtained in Experiment 1 provide the first direct evidence that dependent individuals systematically adjust their behavior in order to strengthen relationships with those persons who will be best able to provide support, guidance, and protection over the long term. These results indicate that the passive, submissive behavior that is often exhibited by the dependent person may be best understood as a self-presentation strategy that is intended to strengthen ties with potential caretakers. Consistent with Bornstein et al.’s (1987) findings, the results of Experiment 1 confirm that when dependent people are forced to choose between getting along with a peer and impressing an authority figure, they will opt to impress the authority figure, thereby currying favor with the individual who is most likely to be able to provide the protection, guidance, and support that the dependent person seeks.

**Experiment 2**

The results obtained in Experiment 1 confirmed that level of dependency and the presence versus absence of an authority figure interact to predict self-denigration/self-promotion behavior in men. Experiment 2 was designed to assess the generalizability of these results across gender. Relatively few studies have examined dependency-related behaviors in both women and men, and in those dependency studies that do involve both sexes, different results are sometimes obtained in men and women (Bornstein, 1992; Masling, 1986). Experiment 2 was an exact replication of Experiment 1, except that female participants were used in place of male participants. We hypothesized that the results obtained in Experiment 1 would be replicated in Experiment 2.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were 60 female undergraduates enrolled in general psychology courses at Gettysburg College. They received course credit for participating
in the dependency prescreening and were paid $5 for participating in the experiment proper.

Materials, Measures, and Procedure

The materials, measures, and procedures used in Experiment 2 were identical to those used in Experiment 1.

RESULTS

Preliminary Data

The mean IDI score for the entire sample in Experiment 2 was 52.30 (SD = 12.31, range = 24 to 89). The mean IDI score for nondependent participants (n = 30) was 44.30 (SD = 6.51), whereas the mean IDI score for dependent participants (n = 30) was 64.29 (SD = 8.62). There was a strong positive correlation between the number of practice items completed and the amount of time spent practicing for the creativity test, r(58) = .78, p < .001. The correlations between participants' music selection scores and their creativity test practice scores were .34 for number of practice items done and .32 for amount of time spent practicing (both ps < .02).

A 2 × 2 between-subjects ANOVA revealed that level of dependency and authority condition had no effect on the number of creativity test items completed (all Fs < 1.20). Correlations between number of test items completed and participants' post-session ratings ranged from .12 to .29. Correlations between number of test items completed and number of practice items done, amount of time spent practicing for the test, and music selection scores ranged from -.11 to .15.

Self-Denigration/Self-Promotion Results

The effects of level of dependency and authority condition on the number of practice items completed are summarized in Figure 3. As this figure shows, there were main effects of level of dependency, F(1, 56) = 4.33, p < .05, and authority condition, F(1, 56) = 8.09, p < .01, on the number of practice items done, with dependent participants completing significantly more practice items than nondependent participants, and those in the authority condition completing significantly more practice items than those in the no authority condition.
There was also a Level of Dependency × Authority Condition interaction, $F(1, 56) = 4.85, p < .05$. Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that dependent participants in the authority condition completed significantly more practice items than dependent participants in the no authority condition, $t(28) = 2.97, p < .01$. The number of practice items completed by nondependent participants in the authority and no authority conditions did not differ, $t(28) = 1.31, ns$.

Similar results were obtained for the amount of time that participants spent practicing for the creativity test. Again, there were main effects of level of dependency and authority condition on practice scores,
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$F(1, 56) = 4.40, p < .05$, for level of dependency, and $F(1, 56) = 6.22, p < .02$, for authority condition. Dependent participants spent more time practicing than nondependent ones, and those in the authority condition spent more time practicing than those in the no authority condition. There was also a Level of Dependency $\times$ Authority Condition interaction for these scores, $F(1, 56) = 5.46, p < .05$. Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that dependent participants in the authority condition spent a significantly greater amount of time practicing than dependent participants in the no authority condition, $t(28) = 2.76, p < .02$. For nondependent participants, the amount of time spent practicing in the authority and no authority conditions did not differ, $t(28) = 0.98, ns$.

As in Experiment 1, the pattern of results obtained in Experiment 2 for participants' music selection scores paralleled closely the results obtained for participants' practice scores. Specifically, there was a main effect of authority condition on participants' music selection scores, $F(1, 56) = 7.67, p < .01$, with participants in the authority condition obtaining significantly higher scores than those in the no authority condition. In addition, there was a significant Level of Dependency $\times$ Authority Condition interaction for these scores, $F(1, 56) = 11.21, p < .005$: Dependent participants in the authority condition selected more enhancing music than dependent participants in the no authority condition, $t(28) = 2.31, p < .05$, but there was no difference in the type of music selected by nondependent participants as a function of authority condition, $t(28) = 1.11, ns$.

**Post-Session Ratings**

The intercorrelations of participants' post-session ratings in Experiment 2 ranged from .20 (for "get along" and "impress professor" ratings) to .58 (for "impress experimenter" and "impress professor" ratings), with a mean post-session rating intercorrelation of .34. The only post-session rating dimension that produced significant results in Experiment 2 was the "impress professor" rating. These results are summarized in Figure 4. As for Experiment 1, there were main effects of level of dependency, $F(1, 56) = 4.22, p < .05$, and authority condition, $F(1, 56) = 4.88, p < .05$, on these ratings, as well as a Level of Dependency $\times$ Authority Condition interaction, $F(1, 56) = 4.54, p < .05$. Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that the "impress professor" ratings provided by dependent participants in the authority condition were significantly higher than the "impress professor" ratings provided
by dependent participants in the no authority condition, $t(28) = 2.19$, $p < .05$. For nondependent participants, these ratings did not differ as a function of condition, $t(28) = 0.58$, ns.

**DISCUSSION**

The central results of Experiment 1 were replicated in Experiment 2. Again, level of dependency and authority condition interacted to determine participants’ self-denigration/self-promotion strategies in a manner consistent with our predictions. As expected, the number of practice
items done, the amount of time spent practicing for the creativity test, and the type of background music selected for the test differed as a function of authority condition in dependent participants, but not in nondependent ones. Thus, the results of Experiment 2 indicate that the dependency-related effects obtained in Experiment 1 occur in women as well as men.

Although the central results of Experiment 1 were replicated in Experiment 2, the post-session ratings provided by participants in Experiment 2 revealed that women's "hard work" and "get along" ratings were not as strongly affected by level of dependency or authority condition as the men's ratings in these areas. Although it is not clear why men produced stronger results on these dimensions, it is worth noting that the pattern of results was consistent with the results of Experiment 1 (for "hard work" ratings, $X = 6.37$ for dependent women and $X = 6.01$ for nondependent women; for "get along" ratings, $X = 6.65$ for dependent women and $X = 6.34$ for nondependent women).

One subsidiary finding from Experiments 1 and 2 warrants brief discussion. The mean IDI score produced by women in Experiment 2 ($X = 52.30$, $SD = 12.31$) was significantly higher than the mean IDI score produced by men in Experiment 1 ($X = 46.00$, $SD = 14.76$), $t(118) = 2.52, p < .02$. This result is consistent with previous findings indicating that on self-report measures, women typically obtain higher dependency scores than men (Birtchnell, 1991; Masling, 1986). Although there is strong evidence that men and women have comparable underlying dependency needs (see Bornstein, Manning, Krukonis, Rossner, & Mastrosimone, 1993), women are more willing than men to acknowledge these needs on self-report measures.

Taken together, the results of Experiments 1 and 2 provide strong evidence that dependent individuals self-denigrate when they are primarily concerned with getting along with a peer, but self-promote when they are primarily concerned with impressing an authority figure. The purpose of Experiment 3 was to assess the generalizability of these results across type of task, that is, to investigate whether similar results would be obtained when different self-denigration/self-promotion measures are used.

### Experiment 3

Participants in Experiment 3 were prescreened for level of dependency, placed in same-sex pairs, and asked to complete "creativity tests" simi-
lar to those used in Experiments 1 and 2. As in Experiments 1 and 2, half of the participants were told that two psychology professors would be evaluating their test results, and half of the participants were told that their test results would remain anonymous. All participants were told that after completing the creativity tests, they would meet together with the experimenters to go over their test results.

When both participants in each pair had completed their creativity tests, they were told that because of the subjective nature of this test, each test would be evaluated twice—once by themselves, and once by their partner. Thus, participants assigned a series of evaluative ratings to their own test protocol and then assigned ratings to a similar test protocol that they believed was produced by their partner. The measure of self-denigration/self-promotion used in this experiment was the difference between a participant’s self- and partner ratings. To the extent that participants assigned higher ratings to themselves than to their partner, they were “self-promoting.” To the extent that they assigned higher ratings to their partner than to themselves, they were “self-denigrating.” After participants scored the two test protocols, they completed a post-session rating form identical to that used in Experiments 1 and 2.

Thus, Experiment 3 used a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed design, with subject gender, level of dependency, and authority condition as between-subjects variables, and locus of rating (self vs. partner) as a within-subjects variable. For both men and women, we hypothesized that there would be a three-way interaction of level of dependency, authority condition, and locus of ratings on participants’ evaluative ratings. The form of this three-way interaction should be as follows: For nondependent participants in both authority conditions, there should be no significant difference between participants’ self- and partner ratings (although we anticipate that participants will assign slightly higher ratings to their own test protocol than to that of their partner). Dependent participants in the no authority condition should assign higher ratings to their partner’s test protocol than to their own test protocol. Dependent participants in the authority condition should produce the opposite pattern of results, assigning higher ratings to their own test protocol than to that of their partner.

Our hypotheses for participants’ post-session ratings in Experiment 3 were as follows: Based on the results of Experiments 1 and 2, we hypothesized that dependent men would provide significantly higher “hard work” and “get along” ratings than nondependent men. However, we hypothesized that there would be no difference in these ratings
for dependent and nondependent women, and no difference in "impress experimenter" ratings as a function of level of dependency or authority condition for participants of either sex. The pattern of results obtained for "impress experimenter" ratings in Experiment 3 should be the same as that obtained in Experiments 1 and 2.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were 80 undergraduates (40 women and 40 men) enrolled in general psychology classes at Gettysburg College who had not participated in the earlier experiments. Participants received course credit for taking part in the dependency prescreening and were paid $5 for participating in the experiment proper.

**Procedure**

Groups of 10 to 15 participants were prescreened for level of dependency using Hirschfeld et al.'s (1977) IDI. Approximately 160 participants attended the prescreening sessions. Participants were divided into dependent and nondependent groups using median splits. Because women generally obtain higher IDI scores than men, separate median splits were used for men and women. Several weeks after the prescreening, participants were contacted by phone and asked if they would participate in the follow-up session. Recruitment continued until 40 same-sex pairs (20 female pairs and 20 male pairs) had been created, each consisting of one dependent and one nondependent participant. When participants arrived at the laboratory for the follow-up session, they received the same instructions as participants in Experiments 1 and 2. They were then taken to separate rooms to complete the creativity tests.

When both participants in each pair had completed their creativity tests, the experimenters administered the following instructions:

There's one last part to the experiment. Since this is a test of creativity, scoring the test is—as you might think—a bit subjective. What we've found works best is to have each test scored separately by two people, and then we can pool the ratings and come up with an overall score for each person. In general, we've found that the quality of a person's responses is more important than the number of responses, so you might want to keep that in mind as you do your ratings. Here's the rating sheet that we use to score these tests. As you can see, scoring the test involves making a series of 9-point ratings of the person's test responses. What we'd like you to do is fill out one of these rating forms for your test. The other subject will do the
same thing with his/her test. When you're both done we can switch tests and you can score the other subject's test while he/she scores yours.

At this point, each participant was handed a one-page Creativity Test Rating Form that contained seven 9-point rating scales. The following dimensions were listed on the rating form: originality, interestingness, complexity, inventiveness, uniqueness, imaginativeness, and creativity. Each rating scale was anchored with the terms "Not at all _____" (1) and "Very _____" (9).

When participants had completed the ratings of their own test, the experimenter collected the test and rating form from them and left the room, purportedly to get the partner's test protocol and a blank rating form. In reality, the experimenter left the room, tallied the number of responses on the participant's creativity test, and retrieved from the laboratory a bogus creativity test protocol that contained approximately the same number of responses as the participant's test protocol. These bogus creativity tests had been constructed earlier, and contained 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, or 40 responses. The responses used in the bogus creativity tests were selected from those provided by participants in Experiments 1 and 2 and were intended to be a representative sample of all participants' creativity test responses.

Each participant completed a Creativity Test Rating Form for the "partner's" test protocol (which was actually the bogus test protocol). The experimenter then collected the materials from the participant and asked him or her to complete a copy of the post-session rating form. After both participants had completed their post-session rating forms, they were reunited, debriefed, and paid.

Two creativity test rating scores were derived for each participant—one reflecting the participant's ratings of his or her own test protocol, and the other reflecting the participant's ratings of his or her partner's test protocol. Creativity test rating scores were derived by obtaining the mean of each participant's self-ratings and the mean of his or her partner's ratings. These scores could potentially range from 1 to 9, with higher scores reflecting more positive ratings.

**RESULTS**

**Preliminary Data**

The mean IDI score for women ($n = 40$) was 54.35 ($SD = 12.81$), whereas the mean IDI score for men ($n = 40$) was 48.03 ($SD = 9.81$). As expected, women obtained significantly higher IDI scores than men, $t(78) = 2.45, p < .02$. Mean intercorrelation among participants' self-ratings was .59 for women and .56 for men, while the mean intercorrelation among participants' partner ratings was .62 for women and .69.
for men. The mean correlation between participants' self- and partner ratings was .25 for women and .40 for men.

As in Experiments 1 and 2, a $2 \times 2$ between-subjects ANOVA revealed that level of dependency and authority condition had no effect on the number of test items completed (all $F$s < 0.98). Correlations between number of creativity test items completed and participants' post-session ratings ranged from $-0.17$ to $0.20$. The correlations between number of creativity test items completed and number of practice items done, amount of time spent practicing for the creativity test, and music selection scores ranged from $-0.15$ to $0.13$.

**Self-Denigration/Self-Promotion Results**

A $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ mixed ANOVA assessing the effects of participant gender, level of dependency, authority condition, and locus of rating on participants' creativity test rating scores revealed a number of main effects and interactions. The only effect involving participant gender was a marginally significant Gender $\times$ Locus of Rating interaction, $F(1, 36) = 3.14$, $p = 0.09$: Although men assigned slightly higher ratings to their own creativity test ($M = 5.78$) than to that of their partner ($M = 5.46$), women assigned slightly higher ratings to their partner's test ($M = 5.63$) than to their own ($M = 5.40$). Because there were no other main effects or interactions involving participant gender, separate $2 \times 2 \times 2$ ANOVAs were conducted for men and women in order to simplify the analysis and obtain a clearer picture of the results of Experiment 3.

The effects of level of dependency, authority condition, and locus of rating on women's creativity test rating scores are summarized in Figure 5. There was a main effect of level of dependency on creativity test ratings, with dependent women giving higher ratings than nondependent women, $F(1, 36) = 5.20$, $p = .05$. There was also a Level of Dependency $\times$ Locus of Rating interaction, $F(1, 36) = 4.27$, $p < .05$: Overall, dependent women gave higher partner ratings than self-ratings, but the self- and partner ratings of nondependent women did not differ. Finally, there was a significant three-way interaction for these data, $F(1, 36) = 14.74$, $p < .005$. Dependent women in the no authority condition gave higher ratings to their partner's test protocol than to their own test protocol, but there was no difference in self- versus partner ratings for dependent women in the authority condition, nor were there
any differences in these ratings for nondependent women (regardless of condition).

Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that for dependent women in the no authority condition, partner ratings were significantly more positive than self-ratings, $t(18) = 3.08, p < .01$. However, for women in the other three conditions, self- and partner ratings did not differ ($t$s ranged from 0.67 to 1.69 in these conditions, all $ps > .10$).

Somewhat similar results were obtained for men. These data are summarized in Figure 6. As Figure 6 suggests, there was a main effect of level of dependency on men's creativity test ratings, with dependent
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Figure 6
Effects of Level of Dependency, Authority Condition, and Locus of Ratings on Men's Creativity Test Ratings: Experiment 3

men giving higher ratings than nondependent men, $F(1, 36) = 9.20$, $p < .005$. There was also a significant three-way interaction for these data, $F(1, 36) = 24.27$, $p < .001$: Dependent men in the no authority condition gave higher partner ratings than self-ratings, whereas dependent men in the authority condition showed the opposite pattern of results. Nondependent men gave higher self-ratings than partner ratings, regardless of authority condition.

Follow-up $t$ tests confirmed that dependent men in the no authority condition gave significantly higher partner ratings than self-ratings, $t(18) = 2.98$, $p < .01$, whereas dependent men in the authority
condition gave significantly higher self-ratings than partner ratings, \( t(18) = 2.65, p < .02 \). Although the self-ratings of nondependent men in the authority condition were significantly higher than the partner ratings provided by these participants, \( t(18) = 2.21, p < .05 \), this difference was only marginally significant for nondependent men in the no authority condition, \( t(18) = 1.72, p = .10 \).

**Post-Session Ratings**

As in Experiments 1 and 2, participants' post-session ratings in Experiment 3 were all positively intercorrelated. For women, these intercorrelations ranged from .31 (for "hard work" and "impress experimenter" ratings) to .67 (for "impress professor" and "impress experimenter" ratings), with the mean post-session rating intercorrelation being .45. For men, these intercorrelations ranged from .09 (for "get along" and "impress professor" ratings) to .65 (for "impress experimenter" and "impress professor" ratings), with the mean post-session rating intercorrelation being .39.

For women, the only post-session rating dimension that produced significant results in Experiment 3 was the "impress professor" rating. There was a main effect of authority condition on these ratings, such that women in the authority condition gave higher "impress professor" ratings than women in the no authority condition, \( F(1, 36) = 4.53, p < .05 \). The mean "impress professor" rating assigned by women in the authority condition was 6.83 (SD = 1.59), whereas the mean "impress professor" rating assigned by women in the no authority condition was 5.95 (SD = 1.07). There were no other main effects or interactions involving women's post-session ratings (Fs ranged from 0.40 to 1.63, all ps > .10).

For men, there was a significant Level of Dependency \( \times \) Authority Condition interaction for "impress professor" ratings, \( F(1, 56) = 4.54, p < .05 \). The pattern of results obtained in this analysis was very similar to that obtained for participants' "impress experimenter" ratings in Experiments 1 and 2. Specifically, dependent men in the authority condition gave higher "impress professor" ratings than dependent men in the no authority condition, \( t(38) = 3.92, p < .01 \), but the "impress professor" ratings of nondependent men did not differ as a function of authority condition, \( t(38) = 1.13, ns \).

There also were marginally significant main effects of level of dependency on men's "hard work," \( F(1, 36) = 3.31, p = .07 \), and "get
along,” $F(1, 36) = 3.02, p = .09$, ratings. On both dimensions, dependent men gave higher ratings than nondependent men. There were no main effects or interactions involving men’s “impress experimenter” ratings ($Fs$ ranged from 0.01 to 1.76, all $ps > .10$).

**DISCUSSION**

Although the data obtained in Experiment 3 were not quite as strong as those from Experiments 1 and 2, the results of Experiment 3 supported our a priori hypotheses and were consistent with the results of our earlier experiments. For men, the hypothesized interaction of level of dependency, authority condition, and locus of ratings was obtained, with dependent men in the authority condition giving significantly higher self-ratings than partner ratings, and dependent men in the no authority condition producing the opposite pattern of results. The predicted pattern of results was obtained for dependent women in the authority condition, but the self- and partner ratings provided by dependent women in the no authority condition did not differ significantly. In this context, it is important to note that the pattern of results produced by dependent women in the no authority condition was in line with our hypothesis, even though the difference in self- versus partner ratings provided by these participants did not reach statistical significance.

As with Experiments 1 and 2, the post-session ratings provided by participants in Experiment 3 were generally in line with our predictions, although stronger results were again obtained for men than women in this area. Although the relationships of level of dependency to men’s “hard work” and “get along” ratings were only marginally significant in Experiment 3, men did produce the expected Level of Dependency $\times$ Authority Condition interaction for “impress professor” ratings. Women did not produce this interaction, however, and showed only a main effect of level of dependency on “impress professor” ratings. Clearly, the effects of level of dependency and presence versus absence of an authority figure on participants’ self-reports of behaviors and motivations during laboratory tasks are somewhat variable. Moreover, the results of Experiments 1 through 3 suggest that these self-report effects are stronger in men than in women.

It is not clear why stronger self-report effects were obtained for men than women in these experiments. The data collected in these studies do not permit us to address this question. For now, it is sufficient to note that our results are consistent with previous research assessing the rela-
tionship of level of dependency to self-reports of behaviors, attitudes, and motivations in men and women. Although studies in this area have addressed a wide variety of issues in different subject groups (e.g., college students, psychiatric patients, community subjects), and settings (e.g., laboratory, clinic, field), they typically found stronger relationships between level of dependency and self-report variables in men than in women (see Hirschfeld et al., 1977; Kline & Storey, 1977; Masling, 1986; Masling & Schwartz, 1979). Additional research will be needed to disentangle the complex effects of gender and level of dependency on self-reports of attitudes, motivations, beliefs, and behaviors.

The results of Experiment 3 do confirm that the self-denigration/self-promotion results obtained in Experiments 1 and 2 generalize across type of task. These data confirm that, as Bornstein et al.'s (1987) findings suggested, the dependent person does not invariably behave in a passive, submissive manner. Rather, these results indicate that the dependent person can become quite active when "competing" for the attention and favor of an authority figure. These findings have implications for understanding the situational variables that influence the dependent person's behavior in social settings and represent an important step in developing and refining an interactionist model of interpersonal dependency.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Although traditional trait-oriented models of dependency (e.g., the psychoanalytic and social learning models) have generated a number of interesting findings during the past several decades, the present results suggest that an interactionist conceptualization of dependency may have greater predictive value than these dispositional approaches. In the present investigation, varying salient aspects of the dependent person's environment produced measurable changes in his or her behavior. These findings indicate that dependent people may behave in an active, assertive manner if they believe that by doing so they will impress an authority figure. Not only are dependent people willing to compete actively with a peer to impress an authority figure (Experiments 1 and 2), but they are also willing to cast aspersions on a peer's performance if by doing so they might improve their standing relative to the peer in the eyes of an authority figure (Experiment 3).

In this context, it is clear that situational variations in the dependent person's behavior may be understood, at least in part, as self-
presentation strategies that are intended to strengthen ties to potential nurturers and caretakers. When getting along with a peer is the most salient concern for dependent people, they will be likely to use ingratiation and supplication strategies to curry favor with the peer, exhibiting such behaviors as opinion conformity and self-deprecation to accomplish this goal (see Jones & Pittman, 1982, for detailed descriptions of these self-presentation strategies and their associated behaviors). In contrast, when pleasing an authority figure is a primary concern, then dependent people are likely to use the strategy of self-promotion, emphasizing their competence and skill in order to impress the authority figure (Jones & Pittman, 1992). Such a strategy is intended to curry favor with the individual who will be best able to offer protection and support over the long term, even though this self-presentation strategy may well engender a negative reaction from those peers against whom the dependent person's performance is being compared.

Thus, in interpreting the present results, it is important to keep in mind that the manipulations used in these experiments did not (and were not intended to) influence the intensity of participants' underlying dependency needs. Rather, these manipulations were designed to affect the kinds of behavioral strategies used by dependent individuals in their attempts to obtain support and approval from others. In this context, it is clear that the present results are consistent with Bornstein's (1992, 1993) contention that the "core" motivation of the dependent person is to obtain and maintain nurturant, supportive relationships. These results further suggest that dependent people (a) assess the potential "value" of various figures in the environment who might be able to offer help, protection, and support; and then (b) direct their energy and attention to pleasing those figures who appear best able to provide such guidance and help. Although Bornstein's (1993) four-component model of dependency has not been tested directly and awaits empirical verification, recent studies in this area—as well as the findings of the present experiments—offer indirect support for this model (see Bornstein, 1995).

The present results suggest that although dependency in adults is a stable personality "trait" (or, more accurately, a stable set of interrelated cognitions, motivations, behaviors, and affective responses; see Bornstein, 1992, 1993), the behavior of the dependent person can only be understood completely—and predicted accurately—with reference to the context in which it is exhibited. Although the core underlying motivation of the dependent individual remains constant over time and across situation, the behavior exhibited by the dependent person
changes from situation to situation, reflecting (a) the dependent person's perceptions of the demands, expectations, and behavioral constraints that characterize a given situation; and (b) his or her beliefs regarding which behaviors are most likely to produce the desired outcome given those demands, expectations, and constraints.

In certain respects, our results dovetail with a number of findings that have emerged in the self-handicapping literature during the past 20 years. When dependent individuals undermine their test performance by refusing to prepare for the test and selecting background music that will inhibit their performance (Experiments 1 and 2), and when they evaluate their partner's test protocol more positively than their own (Experiment 3), it is clear that they are engaging in a form of self-handicapping behavior. To be sure, this is a nontraditional use of the term "self-handicapping." In Jones and Berglas's original (1978) article, self-handicapping was conceptualized as a strategy used by individuals to provide external attributions for performance deficits, thereby protecting self-esteem and enabling the individual to discount the importance of a poor performance or failure experience. During the past two decades, however, researchers have extended the self-handicapping concept into other domains, and it is now clear that individuals self-handicap in order to protect the "public" as well as the "private" self-concept (see, e.g., Baumgardner, Lake, & Arkin, 1985; Kimble, Funk, & DaPolito, 1990; Smith, Snyder, & Perkins, 1983).

The present results suggest that a form of self-handicapping may also be used to undermine one's performance on a task in order to ensure that another person will outperform one on this task. Such a strategy might well be used in situations where getting along with another person is more important than performing better than this person on the task in question. The no authority conditions in Experiments 1 through 3 clearly represent situations where strengthening ties with a peer was more important to the dependent person than outperforming the peer on a laboratory task. Other situations where this form of self-handicapping would be likely to occur might include the graduate student who does not want to alienate his or her mentor by outperforming the mentor in a public forum, and the athletic woman who does not want to embarrass her unathletic date by outperforming him on some physical task.

Taken together, the results of the present experiments confirm that greater attention must be paid to understanding the cognitive components of dependency. To date, there has been very little research in this area. Nonetheless, consistent with Mischel's (1979, 1984) view that the
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behavior of individuals is best understood as proactive and directed by beliefs and expectations regarding self and others, the present results suggest that the behavior of the dependent person can best be understood with reference to his or her underlying cognitive constructs. As Dweck and Leggett (1988) noted, the explanatory power of dispositional variables such as dependency "lies in their ability to predict what behaviors will be exhibited in various situations, not in their prediction that the same behavior will be exhibited across situations" (p. 270).

Because dependent individuals interpret different situations as involving different demands, opportunities, and risks, they choose to behave in somewhat different ways in different contexts. Underlying these surface differences in behavior, however, is a fundamental consistency: When the prototypic behaviors of dependent persons in different situations and settings are interpreted in the context of these individuals' most important cognitive constructs (i.e., a view of the self as powerless and ineffectual, and a belief that others can provide needed guidance and protection) and motivations (i.e., a desire to be guided and supported by others), apparent inconsistencies in their behavior in different situations and settings simply disappear.

Thus an interactionist model of dependency may help to reconcile some of the conflicting findings that have emerged in this area in recent years. For example, results suggesting that dependent persons seek medical help more quickly than nondependent persons when physical symptoms appear (e.g., Greenberg & Fisher, 1977) have long been regarded as incompatible with the results of other studies demonstrating that dependent individuals are passive and unassertive in a variety of situations and settings (e.g., Masling et al., 1968). However, these ostensibly conflicting results are actually quite compatible when one recognizes that, regardless of whether the dependent person is behaving actively or passively, he or she is invariably attempting to obtain and maintain relationships with potential nurturers and protectors. Blum and Miller's (1952) finding that dependent schoolchildren are passive and acquiescent when interacting with peers but affectionate and demonstrative when interacting with teachers represents yet another example of the ways in which dependent persons adjust their behavior to maximize the probability that they will maintain ties to nurturing, caretaking figures (see also Sroufe et al., 1983, for related findings).

The dependent person's willingness to become active and assertive when attempting to please authority figures suggests that dependency is not, in and of itself, a maladaptive trait. Although most theoreticians and
researchers regard dependency primarily as a flaw or deficit in functioning (Ainsworth, 1969; Birtchnell, 1988; Millon, 1981), the dependent individual’s concern with obtaining and maintaining ties to authority figures often leads to adaptive achievement- and health-promoting behaviors. For example, high levels of dependency are associated with strong academic performance among high-school students, in part because the dependent adolescent is more concerned than the nondependent adolescent with pleasing parents and teachers by performing well academically (Bornstein & Kennedy, 1994). Along slightly different lines, several studies have demonstrated that dependent persons comply more conscientiously than nondependent persons with medical and psychological treatment regimens (Bornstein, Krukonis et al., 1993; Greenberg & Bornstein, 1989; Poldrugo & Forti, 1988). Needless to say, to the extent that one complies rigorously with a medical or psychotherapeutic regimen, the likelihood of a positive treatment outcome will increase.

CONCLUSION

Altering our conceptualization of dependency to reflect the fact that high levels of dependency are associated with active as well as passive behavior represents a fundamental shift in our understanding of the dynamics of dependent personality traits. In certain respects, this shift is quite similar to developmental researchers’ changing conceptualization of the infant-caretaker relationship. For many years, the infant was viewed as a passive recipient of the caretaker’s ministrations (see Ainsworth, 1969). Only recently have developmental researchers come to appreciate the degree to which the infant plays an active role in initiating and directing interactions with the primary caretaker (Beebe, 1986; Stern, 1977).

Like the infant, the dependent person has traditionally been viewed as a passive recipient of other people’s nurturant, supportive behaviors. However, just as the traditional view of the infant as passive recipient has turned out to be overly limited (and perhaps a bit naïve), the traditional view of the dependent person as passive recipient has also turned out to be overly limited and—in certain respects—inaccurate. By examining the full range of active and passive behaviors exhibited by infants, we have substantially increased our understanding of the inter- and intrapersonal dynamics of infant-caretaker bonding, attachment behavior, and the processes involved in the acquisition of social competence.
and self-efficacy. As we broaden our conceptualization of dependency to include the full range of active and passive behaviors exhibited by the dependent person, perhaps we will increase our understanding of the ways in which the dependent person's behavior influences early social development and later interpersonal relationships.

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