Drew University College of Liberal Arts

The Influence of Language Abstraction on Judgments of Romantic Relationships

A Thesis in Psychology
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Abstract

The purpose of the current research was to explore how the Language Expectancy Bias (LEB) and contextual situations influence people's judgments of others' romantic relationships. To explore how these two variables interact, participants read one of four scenarios where a female was describing her current partner and relationship in a LEB consistent or LEB inconsistent manner either to a group of friends or in her journal. Participants then answered questions about their judgments of the described relationship, specific characteristics of the people in the relationship, and whether or not they have been in a long-term relationship. People rated the relationship describer as having the most positive feelings towards the relationship in the LEB consistent and private condition. Preliminary findings also suggest that having past relationship experience made people more aware of what type of language is used to describe a good relationship (i.e., LEB consistent language) and what type of language is used to describe a not-so-good relationship (i.e., LEB inconsistent language). This study shows how the LEB and different situational contexts can influence others' perceptions and cause them to draw different conclusions based on particular language.

The Influence of Language Abstraction on Judgments of Romantic Relationships

Social psychology is the study of how an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the real or perceived presence of others (Myers, 2013). Although one might not think it to be the case, the study of language use and the consequences associated with utilizing certain kinds of language are important topics in social psychology. Language changes people's attitudes, alters social perceptions, helps people develop a personal identity, and maintains stereotypes (Krauss & Chiu, 1997). For example, persuasion is more likely to occur when the language used in a message is more intense (e.g., saying something is "very good" versus "good"; Craig & Blankenship, 2011). The slight change in wording causes the recipient of the message to believe that the persuader's position is stronger, thus making person more convincing. People also use language to develop their personal identity by defining themselves as belonging to particular categories (e.g., ethnicities, genders, social classes) or by identifying their personal beliefs (e.g., liberal; Krauss & Chiu, 1997).

Past research has also demonstrated that the way that people use language is affected by a variety of factors, such as their implicit and explicit intentions, the situational context, and to whom they are speaking. For example, on social media websites, the messages that people write to others implicitly suggest how familiar and friendly people are with one another; the more involved and intimate the language is, the more others will perceive a connection between the two people (Bazarova, Taft, Hyung Choi & Cosley, 2012). People alter their language, presumably unintentionally, based on the characteristics of their relationships with others, and the message of closeness

contained in the language is then transmitted to others. Accordingly, even young children, who often do not have a large vocabulary, are able to infer the meaning of words in ambiguous situations based on the speaker's perceived communicative goals and contextual information (Frank & Goodman, 2014).

Another way to think about the importance of language in social psychology is to recognize that it affects how we feel, how we act, and how we interpret our world (i.e., how we think). Consistent with much past research, the current research explores one way in which language use influences cognition - people's mental processing of information, and how this information is used to form judgments (Sternberg, 2011). Because of language, past experiences, and different values, people often interpret the same event differently, which then influences their thoughts and views on the world (i.e., the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis; Kay & Kempton, 1984).

In the current research, I build on the idea that language use shapes cognition, and therefore ultimately people's judgments, by suggesting that language also helps people to define and understand social and romantic relationships. Past research has explored what people mean when they use different kinds of relationship language (e.g., what constitutes a romantic relationship; Banker, Kaestle, & Allen 2010) and what happens in situations in which people's language use more closely matches that of their partners (i.e., linguistic style matching; Ireland, Slatcher, Eastwick, Scissors, Finkel, & Pennebaker, 2011). One issue that past research has yet to explore is how changes in language affect people's judgments about the romantic relationships of others. This thesis proposes that variations in language will alter other people's perceptions about the quality of a

romantic relationship. Before reviewing the specifics of the study that was conducted to

test this hypothesis, I will first introduce the idea of the Linguistic Category Model and

the Language Expectancy Bias and review the literature that suggests that this bias

influences stereotypes, relationships, and relational inferences. I then review the ways in

which this bias might cause other people to view romantic relationships in particular

ways, and report data that explore this idea.

The Language Expectancy Bias

The concept of the Language Expectancy Bias (LEB) was derived from the

Linguistic Category Model, which was developed to explore the ways that people use

descriptive language and the consequences of particular choices. The model consists of

four different linguistic categories that can be used to describe other people and their

actions. In a classic study conducted by Semin and Fieldler (1988) that delineated these

particular linguistic categories, participants were asked to answer questions about how

informative, verifiable, disputable, enduring, and situational short, descriptive sentences

were. Based on these data, Semin and Fieldler were able to classify descriptors into four

different categories, where the first level is the most abstract descriptor and the fourth

level is the least abstract descriptor (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri & Semin, 1989). More

specifically, the categories are as follows: adjectives, state verbs, interpretive action

verbs, and descriptive action verbs (Semin & Fielder, 1988). Adjectives, which are the

most abstract and represent the first level of descriptor, do not specify a distinct event or

action and allow us to make a general classification of a person (e.g., friendly, jealous);

these words tend to be dispositional in nature, meaning that they describe behaviors as

being caused by internal characteristics. State verbs refer to mental or emotional states; there is not a particular beginning or end to the verb (e.g., hate, like). Interpretive action verbs refer to a general class of behaviors that have a clear beginning and end and are positive or negative (e.g., encourage, command). Descriptive verbs, which are the least abstract, refer to one particular activity, the physicality of this action, and do not have a positive or negative connotation (e.g., touch, stop); these words tend to be situational in nature, in that they describe behaviors as being caused by external circumstances. Semin and Fielder (1988) distinguished these four different linguistic categories arguing that they serve different functions when it comes to describing the characteristics of another person. Using more abstract language causes people to draw more dispositional conclusions, while using more concrete language can cause people to draw more situational conclusions about the people being described.

The LEB follows from the *Linguistic Category Model* because it represents an application of these four categories in different situations and with different types of people. In a general sense, the LEB occurs when people describe positive and typical behaviors of others abstractly (perhaps using words that are adjectives or state verbs), which suggests dispositional tendencies and consistency across situations (e.g., admire, impulsive; Gil de Montes, Ortiz, Valencia, Larrañaga & Agirrezabal, 2012). On the other hand, people describe negative and atypical behaviors of others concretely (perhaps using words that are interpretive action verbs or descriptive action verbs), which suggests that these behaviors are an exception to a person's typical behavior and will only occur in particular situations (e.g., kiss, call; Gil de Montes et al., 2012). The LEB represents a

bias because people's personalities and behaviors are described in different ways depending on their relationship with the describer (Semin & Fiedler, 1988; Semin et al., 2002). People want to believe that those to whom they are close are generally good people, and they therefore are likely to think about their positive behaviors in a particular way (i.e., abstractly) and their negative behaviors in a different way (i.e., concretely). Although this is not necessarily conscious or intentional, people use their language in motivated ways in order to maintain these particular ideas.

LEB and stereotyping. One area where we see evidence of the LEB is stereotyping. The LEB is one of many biases that transmits and maintains stereotypes in our society (Gil de Montes et al., 2012; Wigboldus, Semin, & Spears, 2000). People describe stereotype-consistent behaviors abstractly (presumably because they are thought to be typical), but stereotype-inconsistent behaviors (i.e., atypical behaviors) concretely (Maass, Milesi, Zabbini & Stahlbeg, 1995; Maass et al., 1989; Sherman, Klein, Laskey & Wyer, 1997; Wigboldus et al., 2000; Wigboldus, Semin & Spears, 2006; Wigboldus, Spears & Semin, 2005). For example, when it comes to gender stereotypes, female stereotypical behaviors are described abstractly and female non-stereotypical behaviors are described concretely (Gil de Montes et al., 2012; Wigboldus et al., 2000). In one particular study, participants were shown a depiction of a woman on a couch after she watched a sad movie. In one representation, the woman was crying; in the other, the woman was sleeping. When participants were asked to describe what they saw in this cartoon, they described the stereotypical behavior as more abstract (e.g., she is sensitive, she is affected) than the control condition behavior (e.g., she sleeps, she gets bored; Gil

de Montes et al., 2012). These variations in the level of abstractness would then cause

people who overheard those descriptions to draw different conclusions about the situation

and the person. In this example, the concrete descriptions portray that the woman is

feeling bored or sleeping in this particular situational context, whereas in the gender

stereotypical situation, the conclusion that she is sensitive suggests that she will be that

way all the time in all different kinds of situations. The LEB in gender stereotypical

descriptions is one explanation for why people describe males and females differently,

even when they are performing the same action. The bias causes people, both males and

females, to alter the way that they describe gender stereotypical or non-stereotypical

behavior based on who is performing the action. These stereotypes would then be

communicated to others as a result of the particular language that was utilized.

Even when people are given hypothetical stereotypical information about a

particular person or group, they will still describe behaviors that are consistent with this

information abstractly and behaviors that are inconsistent with this information

concretely. Maass et al. (1995) explored this concept by describing a person to

participants as either sociable or unsociable, and as either an intellectual or not an

intellectual. They then showed participants cartoons that either agreed or disagreed with

these descriptions (e.g., a picture of a student lending her notes to another student; a

person refusing an invitation from a friend). The cartoons that depicted the descriptions

correctly, meaning that the cartoons matched the cartoon character's stereotype and

description, were described in abstract ways, whereas the inconsistent cartoons, meaning

that they did not match the cartoon character's stereotype and description, were not. In

order to maintain the particular stereotype they were given, and even though they were

given this information as part of the experimental scenario, participants described the

inconsistent behaviors as exceptions to the cartoon character's regular behavior and

personality, which then maintained the stability of their beliefs about that particular

person (Sherman et al., 1997). This shows how people alter the way they describe the

actions of another person in order to maintain a certain idea of that person.

The LEB also reveals and maintains race or nationality stereotypes (Assilaméhou

& Testé, 2012; Maass et al., 1989; Wigboldus et al., 2000). When it comes to racial

prejudice, people will not explicitly admit to their negative attitudes towards certain

groups; however, the way that people describe stereotypical or non-stereotypical

behaviors of members of those groups could show people's implicit racial prejudices

(von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa & Vargas, 1997). With regard to race, von Hippel et al.

(1997) found that for Caucasian individuals, implicit prejudice towards African

Americans predicted different responses when judging videos of the two races interacting

with one another (e.g., a requestor of one race asking a person of another race for some

money). Those high in implicit prejudice found the African American requestor to be

more threatening than those low in implicit prejudice. Rather than use a standard measure

of implicit racial prejudice, however, they used the *Linguistic Category Model* and the

known information about the LEB as a measure. Participants were given four different

possible descriptions of racial stereotypical information in order to test for implicit

prejudice; the descriptions ranged in specificity from abstract (e.g., the African American

is athletic) to concrete (e.g., the African American won a slam dunk contest). The people

who chose the abstract descriptors for the stereotypical behaviors also had the harshest

responses to the videos of the two races interacting, presumably because their implicit

prejudices were revealed in their biased language choices and their evaluations. These

results support the idea that we are not always aware of our perceptions of others,

especially when those perceptions are socially undesirable, but these perceptions may be

revealed through the language that we use.

     An understanding of the LEB and stereotyping becomes more complex when

addressing the fact that people are either members or non-members of the groups they are

describing, and that people are often motivated to have positive beliefs about the groups

to which they belong. More specifically, people who are members of one's own group are

considered to be ingroup members and therefore, people describe the behaviors of fellow

ingroup members in ways that are LEB consistent (positive behaviors are described

abstractly and negative behaviors are described concretely). On the other hand, people

who are not members of one's group are considered to be outgroup members, and their

behaviors are described in ways that are LEB inconsistent (negative behaviors are

described abstractly and positive behaviors are described concretely). For example, when

people of a particular nationality describe the behaviors or characteristics of a person of a

different nationality (i.e., a member of an outgroup), they tend to describe the behaviors

of that person with LEB *inconsistent* descriptions. In other words, positive behaviors are

described concretely and negative behaviors are described abstractly. The result is

reinforcement of the stereotype that one's own group members have innately good

characteristics and out-group members have innately bad characteristics. One study

looked at how Dutch and Flemish students judged each other when they received

desirable or undesirable descriptions of someone from the other nationality. Each

nationality described its own group's positive, desirable characteristics in abstract ways

and their group's negative, undesirable characteristics in concrete ways (Wigboldus et al.,

2000, Study 2). This suggests that people wish to see their own group as having positive

and desirable dispositional traits while believing that their negative and undesirable traits

occur only in specific and situational circumstances.

　　　　Another example was revealed in a study conducted by Maass et al. (1989), who

explored how people of two different nationalities (e.g., northern Italians and southern

Italians) viewed one another; their findings were also consistent with the LEB. When

reading a vignette about a person from the other nationality performing either desirable or

undesirable behaviors, participants described the other nationality's undesirable

behaviors (e.g., littering) abstractly and desirable behaviors concretely (e.g., helping); the

pattern reversed when describing behaviors of people from their own nationality. The

LEB maintains positive perceptions of our ingroup because people describe positive

behaviors as being related to personality rather than particular situations. It has also been

found that when people describe the behaviors of individuals from their own valued

group in LEB consistent ways, the describer is thought of as a better group member

because she is displaying favoritism towards her own group (Assilaméhou et al., 2012).

　　　　LEB and relationships. There is also evidence of the LEB in personal dyadic

relationships. When describing people who are close to us or with whom we wish to be

close, we tend to describe their positive behaviors abstractly and their negative behaviors

concretely (Semin, Gil de Montes & Valencia, 2002; Wigboldus et al., 2006). Just as

stereotypes can be reinforced by making stereotype-consistent behavior seem

dispositional (i.e., related to personality), people describe positive behaviors of close

others in dispositional terms so that positive perceptions of those people can be

maintained. For example, in the case of someone we like or to whom we are close, we

would say that the person is thoughtful versus outlining specific positive actions carried

out by the person, like saying that the person buys flowers. Information is given about

general positive characteristics of the person in place of information about particular

positive behaviors (Wigboldus et al., 2000). Framing that person's actions in this way

implies that these positive characteristics are consistent across situations and are more

likely to be repeated under all circumstances. In one particular study, participants viewed

a cartoon that depicted an anticipated partner performing either a negative behavior (e.g.,

hitting someone) or a positive behavior (e.g., hugging someone), and then wrote

messages to give to this ostensibly cooperative partner. In these messages, people

described the positive behaviors abstractly to enhance the anticipated relationship with

the cooperative partner (Semin et al., 2002). Implying that they believe that their partner

is a dispositionally good person increases the likelihood that the two will be successful

when cooperating on their future given task.

On the other hand, people tend to describe the negative behaviors of people to

whom we are close less abstractly and more concretely (Maass, Milesi, Zabbini &

Stahlbeg, 1995; Study 2). For example, instead of describing someone as generally

inconsiderate, we might describe the specific behavior itself (e.g., he checks his watch

constantly during conversations). This implies that he engages in the action of checking

his watch, but it does not suggest that that behavior is motivated by a more generalized

negative characteristic (Wigboldus et al., 2000). Again, people do this because they are

trying to maintain a positive representation of this person who is close to them; bad

behaviors are described as only occurring in specific situations, and as exceptions to

overall personalities. Therefore, for people close to us, we often use concrete descriptions

for negative behaviors and abstract descriptions for positive behaviors; we describe their

behaviors in ways that are LEB consistent.

Wigboldus et al. (2006) conducted a study that explored how we tend to describe

people who are close to us. Participants were asked to provide two descriptions of a

friend: one story that described an expected behavior and another story that described an

unexpected behavior. Following this study, another set of participants was asked to read

these descriptions and make a judgment about whether the behavior of the friend was due

to the situation or his or her personality. Providing people with an abstract description of

a person's expected behavior provides the other person with an overarching idea of what

he or she should expect from this person in the future (i.e., they understand that behavior

as a reflection of personality). On the other hand, providing concrete descriptions of

unexpected behaviors suggests that these actions or behaviors only occur in specific

situations (Wigboldus et al., 2006). The participants who read these descriptions drew

conclusions that were consistent with the logic underlying the LEB: We maintain a

positive representation of people who we are close to by describing their positive

behaviors as dispositional and their negative behaviors as situational, and we share those insights with others by using particular kinds of language.

Just as we saw earlier with regard to members of outgroups, we tend to describe the behaviors of people we dislike in ways that are LEB inconsistent - negative behaviors are described abstractly (e.g., he is aggressive) and positive behaviors are described concretely (e.g., he bought me flowers). As a result, negative behaviors will be believed to be applicable across all situations, while positive behaviors will be believed to be specific and situational. In addition to exploring how we write a message to an anticipated cooperative partner, Semin et al. (2002) also explored how we communicate with an anticipated opponent after viewing a positive or negative cartoon of this future opponent. They found that when writing to an opponent, people tended to use abstract language when talking about that person's negative behaviors and concrete language when talking about that person's positive behaviors. This LEB inconsistent language may cause describers to believe that the opponent is actually an internally bad person and serve as a motivation that will in turn benefit them on the upcoming competitive task (Semin et al., 2002).

LEB and relational inferences. The LEB not only influences the way that people judge a person who is being described, but it also influences the way that people judge the describer's relationship to that person (Douglas & Sutton, 2006; Wigboldus et al., 2006). From the level of abstractness that the describer uses in his or her language, people make inferences about that person's goals, and his or her relationship to and attitudes about the person who is being described (Douglas & Sutton, 2006). For

example, when a describer uses LEB consistent language, describing positive behaviors abstractly and negative behaviors concretely, people tend to believe that the describer wants to create a positive impression of the person he or she is describing. On the other hand, when a describer uses LEB inconsistent language, people tend to believe that the describer wants to create a more negative impression of the other person. In one study demonstrating this idea, participants observed a series of scenes and were told that a friend, an enemy, and an outside observer wrote descriptions of them. Participants were given one description for each scene and had to pick who they believed wrote it. Douglas and Sutton (2006; Study 1) found that when given a positive description with more abstract language, participants inferred that the describer was a friend of the person being described. On the other hand, for negative behaviors described with abstract language, people assumed that the describer was an enemy of the person in the scenes.

People are even able to make judgments about how close they are to another person by how abstract or concrete the other person's language is. Compared to a person who receives a positive concrete message from someone else, a person who receives a positive abstract message feels closer to that person (Reitsma-van Roojien et al., 2007). Using the same procedure described earlier, Douglas and Sutton (2006; Study 2) also asked participants to judge whether the descriptions of the target scenes were intended to create a positive impression, a negative impression, or an unbiased impression of the person. They found that when using positive abstract language, people rated the describer as wanting to create a more positive impression. When using negative abstract language, however, people rated the describer as wanting to create a negative impression. Changing

a few descriptive words in a communicative message therefore has the ability to create the perception of a greater sense of proximity and closeness between two people.

Although language use is likely not a conscious process, it seems clear that people can use LEB consistent language if they want to imply a sense of closeness to a person; they use abstract language for positive descriptions and concrete language for negative descriptions. In terms of relationships more generally, when they are described to another person and people want that other person to have a positive outlook about a relationship, the relationship itself could be described in a way that is LEB consistent (Wigboldus et al., 2006). We want the other person to see the positive aspects of the relationship as occurring quite often and the negative aspects of the relationship as occurring much less frequently. Although the alternative has not been explored specifically, it can be assumed that if people wanted another person to have a more negative outlook about a relationship (e.g., if people were describing an enemy, a previous significant other), they would describe it in ways that are LEB inconsistent (Semin et al., 2002). We would want the other person to see all of the negative aspects of the relationship as occurring frequently and the positive aspects occurring only every once in a while.

Language Use and Situational Contexts

Language use is not only impacted by the relationship to the person who is being described, but also by the intended audience of those descriptions. People disclose information, publicly or privately, in order to make sense of their realities (Birnie & Holmber, 2007). But depending on the audience, people may differ in what they choose to say and how they say it. For example, when writing to an enemy, people tended to

write messages that were LEB inconsistent, but when talking to a cooperative partner, people tended to describe positive behaviors more abstractly, which is LEB consistent (Semin et al., 2002). Some studies have directly manipulated whether people thought they would receive feedback on something they wrote in order to explore whether message content would differ in these conditions (Birnie & Holmber, 2007; Semin et al., 2002); language use does not always differ depending on the feedback expectation, but this could be because in both conditions, the person receiving the message was a stranger. Participants may not have been worried about what they wrote because they knew they would never have to meet that person. It is possible that if they knew that they would have to come into contact with this person, they may have been more conservative and filtered what they wrote about their relationship in order to maintain a particular image.

Language also changes when talking about different milestones within a relationship. Blackburn, Brody, and Febvre (2014) explored how people's language changes in breakup situations by asking people to write about a breakup they experienced within the past two years. In one condition, participants were told that their responses would be put on a public blog where their friends and families could read about their breakup. In the other condition, they were told that they would be writing to a private journal that would not be seen by anyone else. In the public setting, Blackburn et al. (2014) found that people tended to use the pronoun "we" in order to frame the situation as mutual, to maintain a positive public image, and to minimize questions from their public audience. On the other hand, for the private setting, people tended to use "I" because this helped them to situate themselves within that context and gain a better

understanding of their identity after the breakup (Blackburn et al., 2014). Findings such as these show how people alter their language when writing in either a private or public setting in order to maintain a particular image of themselves or their relationships, or to help them gain a better understanding of an issue.

The Current Research

The LEB has generated a great deal of research. Despite the fact that people rarely choose their language consciously or intentionally, research on the LEB has demonstrated that people alter the way they talk about others based on their relationship to that particular person (Maass et al., 1989; Semin et al., 2002). Additionally, past research has demonstrated that the LEB influences how people perceive and think about others and themselves. For people who are ingroup members, or close others, positive behaviors are described abstractly (e.g., he is kind) and negative behaviors concretely (e.g., he yelled at me; Gil de Montes et al., 2012). For people who are outgroup members, or others to whom we are not, positive behaviors are described concretely (e.g., he opened the door for me) and negative behaviors abstractly (e.g., he is aggressive). This maintains a positive view of those to whom we are close and a negative view those to whom we are not close (Assilaméhou & Testé, 2012; Maas et al., 1989). When talking about people in a manner that is LEB consistent, the implication is that their positive characteristics occur across all situations and the negative ones only occur in particular instances. When talking about people in a manner that is LEB inconsistent, the implication is that their negative characteristics occur across all situations and the positive ones only occur in specific situations.

We also know that people may form judgments about a speaker depending on the context in which the description occurs. More specifically, past research has found that people make judgments about a particular person or relationship based not only on what was said, but also the circumstances in which that information was said (Birnie et al., 2007; Blackburn et al., 2014; Semin et al., 2002). If communication occurs in a public setting, people may have a more negative view of the person giving the description if she is talking about her issues to other people. Because that message is being said in a public setting, people may also believe that the information is exaggerated or filtered in order to maintain a particular self-presentation. On the other hand, if the information is perceived to be from a private setting, then people may have more positive views of the person and perceive the description to be more truthful.

When thinking about these literatures in combination, there are still many unexplored issues. First, past research has not looked into how people judge others' overall relationship quality, nor their perceptions of how long a relationship will last based on whether the information provided about that relationship is LEB consistent or LEB inconsistent. It is known that people use language in a biased manner when describing others with whom they are close, and that those who read this biased language will come to particular conclusions about these people. But do others who read this biased language also come to particular conclusions about the actual relationship? In order to explore this issue, I created two different scenarios where a female describes her current romantic relationship with her male partner. The descriptions differ in whether the language the female uses as she describes her partner and their relationship is LEB

consistent (positive behaviors are described abstractly and negative behaviors are described concretely) or LEB inconsistent (positive behaviors are described concretely and negative behaviors are described abstractly). I predict that excerpts that are LEB consistent will lead to more positive judgments of the overall relationship in comparison to those that are LEB inconsistent. More specifically, I predict that people will judge the female to be more satisfied, content, committed, and happy with her relationship when she talks about her partner in a LEB consistent way rather than in a LEB inconsistent way. I expect this to occur because people will respond to the biased LEB language: in the LEB consistent condition, they are likely to conclude that the positive characteristics of the partner and relationship occur often and the negative characteristics occur in only specific situations. Their overall evaluation of the relationship should then be more positive than that of those who read the biased language in the LEB inconsistent condition, who are likely to conclude more negative overall evaluations of the relationship.

Second, past research has not looked at how situational contexts influence people's judgments of relationships when they are described in LEB consistent and LEB inconsistent ways. To explore this issue, the descriptions will be presented as excerpts either from a conversation with a group of friends or from a journal entry. I predict that people will be more likely to believe that the female is writing about her thoughts and emotions in a truthful way in the journal condition as opposed to exaggerating her thoughts for the purposes of connecting with her friends and looking for affirmation in the public condition. This variable is likely to interact with the LEB manipulation such

that people will be especially likely to have positive judgments of the overall relationship and perceive the female to be more satisfied, content, committed, and happy when she uses LEB consistent language to describe her partner and the description is thought to be private.

Finally, the current research will also look to see how people who have experienced what they consider to be a long-term relationship judge these different scenarios. It is possible that people who have past relationship experience may be more attentive to the cues provided by the LEB consistent and LEB inconsistent language. This research will also explore the potential effects of LEB consistent and LEB inconsistent language and situational contexts on people's judgments of specific personality characteristics (e.g., caring, considerate, irritable, stubborn) of the two people involved in the relationship. These analyses were exploratory, and no specific findings were hypothesized.

Method

Participants

Forty female and 22 male participants, whose ages ranged from 18 to 42 (*M*=19.4, *SD*=3.88), were recruited from a pool of undergraduate students who were enrolled in an Introduction to Psychology course. In exchange for their participation, they received credit toward their research requirement.

Procedure

Participants completed the study individually or with one other person. They were told that the study explores how people judge romantic relationships, and that they would

read information about a romantic relationship and then be asked to answer questions about that information and their thoughts and opinions about the relationship. They were also told that they should read the information very carefully because they would not be able to refer to that information later.

The information they read described Kristina and John, who were twenty-year-old college juniors who have been dating for about ten months. Participants were also told that the two have been talking about different aspects of their relationship and thinking about their future together. This was followed by excerpts from the female's journal entry (private condition) or excerpts from a conversation with her friends (public condition). The excerpts from Kristina were somewhat ambiguous; they contained both negative and positive reflections about John and the relationship. There were two versions of the excerpts (see Appendix A). In one version, John was described in ways that are LEB consistent: positive actions were described abstractly (e.g., he is thoughtful, he is charming) and negative actions concretely (e.g., he uses a negative tone of voice, he puts down some of my opinions). In the second version, John was described in ways that are LEB inconsistent: positive actions were described concretely (e.g., he buys me flowers, he tells me corny jokes) and negative actions abstractly (e.g., he is impolite, he is aggressive). Without the participants' knowledge, their time spent reading the information on this page was recorded.

Participants then answered questions about their judgments of the relationship (see Appendix B). First, they were asked to list the first five descriptive words that came to mind when thinking about Kristina and John's relationship. On a Likert scale of 1

(Extremely Bad) to 7 (Extremely Good), participants then gave their judgment of the overall quality of the relationship. Next, participants rated how they thought Kristina felt about her relationship with John on seven different measures (e.g., How committed is Kristina to the relationship?; How upset is Kristina with the relationship?). Using a Likert scale of 1 (Not at All) to 7 (Extremely), participants also rated both Kristina and John on a variety of personality characteristics (e.g., caring, considerate, disrespectful, selfish). Participants also rated how likely they thought it would be that John and Kristina would still be together after four months, one year, and after they graduated from college. To ensure that participants were paying attention to the materials themselves, they were asked how long Kristina and John had been dating and the source of the information that they read earlier. Finally, participants answered questions about what they considered a "long-term" romantic relationship to be, whether they had ever been in a long-term relationship, and if they were currently in a relationship (long-term or otherwise). After completing the survey, participants were debriefed.

Results

Attention and Manipulation Checks

In order to ensure that participants were paying attention to the scenario material and determine if the manipulation of situational context was successful, participants were asked how old the male and female in the scenario were and the source of the relationship information (i.e., Kristina's journal or Kristina's conversation with friends). Also, the amount of time that each participant viewed the screen that displayed the critical scenario information was measured (range: 23.30 - 169.22 seconds; $M= 53.63$, $SD= 23.62$). One

participant was excluded from this analysis and subsequent analyses because he or she only viewed the scenario screen for 1.37 seconds.

When asked how old the male and female in the scenario were, 88.7% of participants answered this question correctly. When asked about the source of the scenario information, 64.5% answered correctly. Although this percentage may seem low, it seems that the wording of the question might have been unclear. Many participants correctly reported that the information came from Kristina, and they didn't go on to indicate more detail, like the context in which Kristina provided that information (i.e., to her friends or in her journal). In order to avoid losing data from one third of the sample due to potential confusion with the question, these data were included in the analyses reported below.

Primary Dependent Variables

Participants' judgments about the overall relationship, how the female was feeling about her relationship, and whether people thought the couple would be together in the future were analyzed. A 2x2 between-participants analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on each of these variables with manipulations of LEB (i.e., LEB consistent relationship description or LEB inconsistent relationship description) and situational context (i.e., public or private) as the two independent variables.

It was expected that participants would view the relationship most positively in the LEB consistent and private condition. Scores on this single measure could range from 1 to 7 with higher numbers indicating that participants felt the relationship was of higher quality. The ANOVA on this measure revealed no statistically significant findings. The

main effects of the LEB manipulation, $F(1,58) = 2.31, p = .13$, and situational context,

$F(1,58) = 2.10, p = .15$, were not statistically significant, nor was the interaction of these

variables, $F(1,58) = .74, p = .39$. Means and standard errors for this variable are presented

in Figure 1 in Appendix C.

It was also expected that participants would perceive the female to be more

positive about her relationship in the LEB consistent and private condition. Participants

rated how happy, committed, satisfied, and content the female was with the relationship.

Scores on each of these measures could range from 1 to 7 with higher numbers indicating

more extreme feelings. A reliability analysis revealed that these four variables were

internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$), so they were averaged to create a single

measure of Kristina's relationship positivity. The analysis on this composite measure

revealed that there was a main effect of the LEB manipulation, $F(1,58) = 17.8, p = .00$,

and of the situational context manipulation, $F(1,58) = 4.9, p = .03$. These effects were

qualified by a statistically significant interaction between these variables, $F(1,58) = 2.18$,

$p = .05$. As predicted, participants in the LEB consistent and private condition reported

that the female felt the most positive about her relationship. Means and standard errors

for this variable are presented in Figure 2 in Appendix C.

Participants also rated how frustrated, upset, and irritated Kristina was with the

relationship. Scores on these measures could range from 1 to 7 with higher numbers

indicating more extreme feelings. Responses to these three variables were internally

consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$), so they were averaged to create a single measure of

Kristina's relationship negativity. It was expected that people would perceive the female

to feel most negatively about the relationship in the LEB inconsistent and public

condition. The analysis on this composite measure revealed no statistically significant

findings. The main effects of the LEB manipulation, $F(1,57) = 2.60, p = .11$, and

situational context $F(1,57) = 1.92, p = .17$, were not statistically significant, nor was the

interaction, $F(1,57) =. 80, p = .38$. When each item was analyzed individually to ensure

that the composite was not collapsing over meaningful differences on these variables, the

only significant finding was a main effect of the LEB manipulation on how irritated

people thought the female was, $F(1,58) = 5.38, p = .03$. More specifically, participants in

the LEB inconsistent condition thought that the female felt more irritated with the

relationship ($M = 3.86, SE = .27$) than participants in the LEB consistent condition ($M =$

2.98, $SE = .27$).

An analysis was also conducted on whether participants thought the couple would

be together in four months, one year, and after they graduated. Scores on these measures

could range from 1 to 7 with higher numbers indicating more confidence that the couple

would be together in the future. A reliability analysis revealed that these three variables

were internally consistent (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$), so they were averaged to create a single

measure of future commitment. It was expected that people would have more confidence

that the couple would be together in the future in the LEB consistent and private

condition. The analysis on this composite measure revealed no statistically significant

findings. The main effects of the LEB manipulation, $F(1,58) =.87, p = .35$, and situational

context, $F(1,58) =.05, p = .82$, were not significant, nor was the interaction of these

variables, $F(1,58) =1.40, p= .24$. As revealed in Figure 3 in Appendix C, the averages on

this measure were relatively low across all conditions, suggesting that regardless of the

manipulations, no one was particularly confident that Kristina and John would be

together in the future.

Ancillary Dependent Variables

People's judgments of the male's and female's personality were also analyzed to

explore whether there would be differences in participants' judgments based on the LEB

and situational context manipulations. Composite variables were created for the seven

positive characteristics (i.e., caring, considerate, supportive, companionable, genuine,

likable, kind) for the male (Cronbach's α = .84) and the female (Cronbach's α = .95).

Composite variables were also created for the six negative characteristics (i.e.,

disrespectful, selfish, irritable, cocky, stubborn, conceited) for the male (Cronbach's α =

.85) and the female (Cronbach's α = .91). Analyses on each of the four composite

variables revealed only significant main effects of the LEB manipulation, $F(1,58) = 3.82$,

$p = .05$, and situational context, $F(1,58) = 4.96$, $p = .03$, on participants' evaluations of

the female's positive characteristics. Means and standard errors for this variable are

presented in Figure 4 in Appendix C.

Influence of Past Relationship Experience on Dependent Variables

At the end of the experimental session, participants self-reported whether they had

ever been in a long-term relationship. Of the 60 participants who answered this question,

35 reported that they had experienced a long-term relationship and 25 reported that they

had not. Participants in both categories were distributed across the four conditions

reflecting the manipulated independent variables; there was a minimum of four

participants and a maximum of 11 participants in the eight conditions reflecting both the

manipulated variables and this participant variable. Despite the small sample size in some

cells, exploratory analyses using 2x2x2 between-participants ANOVAs were conducted

to determine whether the relationship experience variable, alone or in combination with

the manipulated independent variables, affected participants' judgments of Kristina and

John's relationship (i.e., overall judgment, perception of the female's positive feelings,

perception of the female's negative feelings, perception of future commitment).

As before, these analyses revealed that there were no significant effects on

participants' overall judgment of the relationship or Kristina's perceived negative

feelings towards the relationship. However, the analysis on the composite measure of

Kristina's perceived positivity towards the relationship revealed a marginally significant

interaction between the LEB manipulation and long-term relationship experience, $F(1,52)$

$= 3.07$, $p = .08$. Means and standard errors for this variable are presented in Figure 5 in

Appendix C. A similar interaction was also found on the composite variable of future

commitment, $F(1,52) = 4.13$, $p = .05$. Means and standard errors for this variable are

presented in Figure 6 in Appendix C.

An Initial Replication

A replication of this study was attempted with 46 female and 54 male participants

recruited through Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a secure online

service where people complete research and other small tasks in exchange for small sums

of money. In exchange for their participation in this study, participants received $1.00 for

their time. The materials were identical to those given to participants from the participant

pool. Participants' ages in the replication sample ranged from 19 to 69 ($M = 35.95$, $SD = 14.90$).

The exact same analysis strategy as outlined above was pursued. A 2x2 between-participants ANOVA with manipulations of LEB consistency and situational context as the two independent variables was conducted on each of the composite dependent variables. These analyses revealed that there were no main effects or interactions on any of the primary or ancillary dependent variables.

Discussion

The current study was designed to explore the effect of the LEB and situational contexts on people's judgments of other people's romantic relationships. Past research has looked at how the LEB influences stereotypes (Gil de Montes et al., 2012), how it influences people's judgments of their own relationships (Semin et al., 2002), and how it alters people's perceptions of the relationship between two people (Semin et al., 2002; Wigboldus et al., 2000; 2006). This research has demonstrated that the language that people use to describe other people and relationships meaningfully alters other's judgments and impressions; LEB consistent language leads to more positive evaluations of others and relationships, while LEB inconsistent language leads to more negative evaluations of others and relationships. Past research on the effects of situational contexts on relationship judgments is much more limited, but this work has revealed that people alter the way that they write and the content that they write depending on who is in the audience (Birnie & Holmber, 2007). No research has looked at how the LEB and

different situational contexts influence how people judge others' romantic relationships, nor how these variables interact with one another to affect those judgments.

The current study explored these issues by examining how the LEB, the situational context, and the interaction of these variables influenced people's judgments of the romantic relationship of a college-aged, heterosexual couple. Participants read one of four scenarios where a female described her current relationship and then they answered questions about their judgments of this relationship. Specifically, participants rated the overall relationship, how positive and negative they felt the female felt about her relationship, and whether they thought the couple would be together in the future. Although the LEB and the situational context manipulations did not affect people's judgments of the overall quality of the relationship, the overall negativity of the female partner, or predictions of whether the couple would be together in the future, there were significant main effects and an interaction on people's perceptions of the overall positivity of the female partner.

Consistent with the hypothesis, people believed that the female felt the most positively about her relationship when she described it in a LEB consistent manner. When she described the positive characteristics of her significant other abstractly and the negative characteristics concretely, people perceived her as feeling more positive about her relationship. Presumably this occurs because participants inferred the abstract positive characteristics to be dispositional, and therefore they were likely to be manifested frequently. On the other hand, the negative characteristics were inferred to be situational, and therefore they were likely to be manifested less frequently. In other

words, people thought that the relationship partner was likely to be an overall good person in the LEB consistent conditions and, as a result, Kristina would feel more positive about the relationship. In contrast, when she described her relationship partner in a LEB inconsistent manner, people perceived her as feeling less positive about the relationship. People most likely inferred that the abstract negative characteristics occurred across situations, while the concrete positive characteristics occurred only in specific situations; therefore, people thought that the partner's negative characteristics were dispositional, so they judged that Kristina would feel less positive about the relationship.

These findings are consistent with past research: People tend to describe their friends and ingroup members in similar ways (Wigboldus et al., 2006; Semin et al., 2002; Wigboldus et al., 2000; Maass et al., 1989). People talk about those with whom they are close or people with whom they identify in ways that are LEB consistent in order to maintain a positive view of these people, both to themselves and to others (Wigboldus et al., 2000). The current research shows how this LEB driven positivity extends to romantic relationships. In this study, participants were able to make predictions about the positivity within a romantic relationship based on the way the female partner wrote or spoke about her significant other. If people want to maintain a positive view of someone or the relationship as a whole, they tend to describe it in ways that are LEB consistent. These findings also extends the findings of Bazarova et al. (2012) in which people make different judgments of the closeness and intimacy between two people based on the language that the two people use to communicate.

Additionally, the main effect of the LEB manipulation on the female partner's positivity was qualified by a significant interaction with the situational context variable; within the LEB consistent conditions, participants in the private condition perceived Kristina to be even more positive about the relationship than people in the public condition. This suggests that people were sensitive to the context in which the female partner delivered her thoughts about the relationship (see also Blackburn et al., 2014); people may have believed that the relationship was going really well if the female felt the need to write about it privately, where there was no audience to receive her comments other than herself. Consistent with Birnie and Holmber's (2007) findings, people may have believed that the information presented in the journal reflected her true feelings, without any self-presentation occurring or any negative aspects being filtered out due to the assumed audience. In the public condition, however, people may have perceived the female as intentionally presenting her relationship in a particular way due to the assumed audience; the female partner could have been filtering out negative information because she described her significant other as having universally positive characteristics and only situational negative characteristics. In the LEB inconsistent description conditions, participants did not make this same contextual differentiation; the female partner was perceived as less positive about her relationship, and there was no difference between the situational contexts. In other words people believed that the relationship was in worse condition, independent of whether she was writing to herself or speaking with her friends. Past research has not explored the relationship between the LEB and delivery of information in public and private situational contexts, so the current study provides

evidence that these variables, in combination, do in fact alter people's judgments of a romantic relationship.

There were no effects on participants' judgments of Kristina's overall negativity about the relationship despite there being an effect on one individual item of how irritated participants believed Kristina to be. Therefore, people's perceptions of the relationship were only manifested on the positive end of their evaluations. It is not clear why this would be the case, although it is possible that the negative descriptors (i.e., angry, frustrated) were too extreme of descriptions because she was also talking about a variety of positive aspects of the relationship. Additionally, there were no significant effects on whether the couple would be together in the future. It's important to note that, generally speaking, the averages on this composite variable suggest that no one was particularly confident that this relationship would be successful into the future. Participants may have perceived the relationship not to be long lasting because of the fact that the people were in college. Additionally, because the female partner was talking about different aspects of her relationship in either a journal or to her friends, people may have thought that she was having doubts about her relationship. If she is having doubts 10 months into the relationship, people may have thought that the relationship would not last after the partners graduated from college because there were already experiencing relationship issues. Therefore, the generally low level of confidence in future commitment might provide some evidence about what people identify as signals that a relationship may not work out in the long run.

Judgments of the personality characteristics of the male and female relationship partners were also explored in the current study. There were no significant effects on the male's positive or negative characteristics or on the female's negative characteristics. However, there was a significant main effect on the female's positive characteristics: People rated the female partner more positively in the LEB consistent condition than in the LEB inconsistent condition. It is possible that participants who read the LEB consistent material viewed the female more positively because she talked about her significant other more positively, which may imply that she is also a good person. Past research has also found that when it comes to stereotyping, people who describe their ingroup members in ways that are LEB consistent are thought of as good group members (Assilaméhou et al., 2012).

Participants' own relationship experience influenced how they perceived the female's overall positivity toward the relationship and their judgments of the likelihood that the couple would be together in the future. Past research has not explored how past personal experience influences people's sensitivity to specific language that is used to describe relationships. Those who had experience in a self-defined long-term relationship were more sensitive to the different types of language that can be used to describe significant others in comparison to those who have not had any experience. Those with experience recognized the LEB inconsistent description as being more negative than those with no long-term relationship experience. Those who have not had experience may not have recognized this as easily because they are not as attentive to what is considered bad and good characteristics of a successful, long-lasting relationship and a good partner.

Therefore, the current study provides some evidence that people's past experiences in relationships have the power to make them understand the meaning underlying different types of language use. Although these data need to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size, they do offer some interesting insight into the effects of relationship experience on understanding relationships and the ways in which they are judged.

As a whole, the current study found that the LEB and the context in which that language is utilized have the ability influence people's judgments of others' romantic relationships. Although this pattern did not emerge on all of the dependent variables, which represent different aspects on which someone could evaluate others' romantic relationships, this study provides some preliminary evidence concerning how these two variables independently and together influence people's judgments. Additionally, the current study provides some evidence that the LEB influences people's judgments of the describer's personality and that past relationship experience may make us more sensitive to the language used to describe relationships when evaluating the positivity of the relationship and predicting the future outcome of that relationship. Even when people are not consciously aware, their perceptions of others are influenced by what people say, the manner of their language, and the source of the information.

Future Directions

The current study was designed to look at how the LEB and different situational contexts influence how people judge a romantic relationship between two college students, but there are still a variety of factors that are unknown with regard to how these two variables interact. Additionally, the current study provides a foundation for future

research to look into how language influences not only people's judgments, but how it also might improve people's relationships.

Differences between age groups. One variable that the current study was not specifically designed to explore is how older adults differ from younger adults with regard to their ratings of romantic relationships. It is possible that older adults would respond to particular situations differently than younger adults because of the fact that certain situations may be differentially relatable. As people get older, it is likely that the issues in romantic relationships are different; they change from being concerned about smaller aspects of the relationship (e.g., spending time together, keeping the romance alive) to larger aspects (e.g., how to raise children, cohabitation). Additionally, older adults are likely to have more relationship experience in comparison to younger adults. The current research showed how past relationship experience could cause people to be more sensitive to particular language when talking about a romantic relationship. Therefore, older adults may be even more sensitive to the LEB because of their additional relationship experience, but only if they find the situation to be relatable to their own current and/or past relationships. Finally, because of this past experience, it may also be the case that older adults define romantic relationships differently (Banker et al., 2010).

Albeit unintentionally, some of these issues may have been exemplified with the MTurk data collected in the replication attempt. It is possible that there were no significant results of the manipulated variables in this study because the people in this older sample could not relate as well to the scenarios; the participants were substantially older than the college students described in the relationship scenario. Additionally,

participants from MTurk believed that in order for a relationship to be considered long-term, people should be together longer (M= 20.20 months, SD= 14.90) than participants from the participant pool did (M= 13.98 months, SD= 10.56). This points out that participants of different ages have different ideas about what constitutes a long-term relationship.

Therefore, future research should include relationship descriptions that would be more relatable to an older adult population to determine if the patterns observed in the current study with the participant pool sample can be replicated in other age groups. The relationship description should change the issues that the describer is addressing in order to be more relatable and also take into consideration that older adults have more relationship experience and may define long-term relationships in different ways.

Banker et al. (2010) looked at how young adults categorize romantic and sexual relationships, but the current literature has not yet looked at how both younger and older adults would categorize a long-term relationship. As evidenced by the current study and the initial replication, people differ with regard to the length of time that two people must be together before they would be in a long-term relationship. In the current study, long-term relationship experience was self-defined: it varied from participant to participant because of the fact that there is no concrete, operational definition of what a long-term relationship is. Older and younger adults probably differ in what they consider the characteristics of a long-term relationship to be (e.g., living together, meeting extended family, etc.) because of the fact that older adults have had more life experience and relationship experience. With this experience, a person sees what works and what does

not work in a relationship and may cause them to more easily relate to the others because they would have more of an idea of what the person is dealing with. Theoretically, this would help to differentiate the age or stage in a person's life in which they change their perception of what constitutes a successful, long-term relationship.

      Different context. Building off the current research, future research could also look into a variety of different kinds of situations to see if LEB consistent and LEB inconsistent descriptions would still have an effect on people's judgments of those situations. An example would be examining whether the LEB influences people's judgments of others' relationships for people that they already know. Theoretically, it is possible that the LEB would have less of an effect on people's judgments of the relationships of known others because they would already have an existing idea or schema of how these people are; this existing knowledge may interfere with judgments that are based solely on the LEB. People are likely to have an intergroup bias for people who they already know, just as they give close others the benefit of the doubt by defining their behaviors in LEB consistent ways. Simply speaking, this means that people believe that their group is right and the outside group is wrong. Therefore, it is possible that people will look past the information that is provided to them and base their judgments on how close they are to the particular people in the relationship, where the closer they are to the people in the relationship, the less of the effect the LEB will have on their judgments. This finding would help to show how our prior experience with people might cause us to maintain a particular perception of a situation despite being presented with new information.

The current study involved a hypothetical situation, so future research could also explore how people's judgments would be affected in a real-life context. Although the conditions here reflected excerpts from a conversation and from a journal entry, participants physically read both of these scenarios, which may have altered their judgments of the situational context variable. A variation of the current study could look into the influence of actually hearing the female talk about her relationship. Instead of reading what the female wrote, it would be interesting to see how listening to a recording of the female talking would influence people's perceptions. Participants would likely judge the relationship differently if they heard the female talk about her relationship in a LEB consistent manner but in a negative tone compared to if they heard her talk in a LEB inconsistent manner but in a positive tone. People would probably pay more attention to the manner in which something is said than to the semantics of what is said. Therefore, it would be likely that the tone of her voice would have more of an effect on people's judgments than whether the information was LEB consistent or LEB inconsistent. Because the majority of past research on the LEB has shown situations in which it does occur, a study such as this would theoretically show a situation where the LEB does not occur because of this other factor. Additionally, it would show that how people say something influences people's judgments in addition to what they have actually said.

Real-life application. Additionally, future research could look into how knowledge about the LEB could help people in real-life contexts. More specifically, it could look at how the language that we use to talk about our past relationships influences how we feel about them. Blackburn et al. (2014) looked at how people change their

language about past relationships depending on the assumed audience, but past research has not looked into how the LEB specifically could influence our feelings towards a past significant other. It is possible that when talking about a past romantic partner in ways that are LEB consistent, it will either make people feel nostalgic for that person or make people happy that the relationship happened. On the other hand, it is possible that talking about a past romantic partner in ways that are LEB inconsistent will make people upset with themselves that they ever dated that person or make people happy that the relationship ended because of all the bad attributes of the partner. In the case of break-up situations, it is not clear which alternative would help people best to cope with the situation: Both offer positive and negatives when it comes to someone moving on from a past relationship. In a therapeutic context, an understanding of the LEB could help individuals cope with break up situations by having them talk about their past relationship in a way that will help them accept what happened and move forward.

Another real-world application could look at how knowledge about the LEB could help couples. If it is the case that we describe ingroup members in a LEB consistent manner because we want to maintain a positive image of these people, what if people also did this for their significant others? If the LEB can alter people's perceptions of another person's relationship, maybe it is possible that the LEB can change how people view their own relationships as well. If people talked about their significant others in ways that are LEB consistent, they could talk themselves into believing that their partner is a universally good person and come to accept their mistakes and flaws as only occurring in specific situations. Although in particular situations (e.g., people who are in abusive

relationships) this would not be helpful to the individual, it would benefit couples that are just going through a rough time in their relationship and need some guidance. Future research could ask couples to talk or write about their partners in LEB consistent ways and see how that influences their relationship in future evaluations. If it is the case that talking about one's partner in ways that are LEB consistent improves perceptions of the overall relationship, this strategy could be implemented for couples who are having problems in their relationship but who are trying to recover.

Conclusion

The current study exemplifies the importance of language within our social relationships. The LEB and different situational contexts altered people's judgments of another person's relationship. Generally, LEB consistent and private descriptions cause people to make more positive judgments while LEB inconsistent descriptions cause people to make less positive judgments. Although this study is the first to examine how these two factors influence people's judgments, it offers a foundation for future research to look into how the LEB may affect people's judgments across different situational contexts and how the LEB can possibly be used in a more real-life setting (such as a therapeutic setting) in order to improve people's romantic relationships.

Appendix A

LEB Consistent/Private

John and Kristina are 20-year-old college students. They are both juniors and they attend the same university. They have been dating for about 10 months. As most couples do when a relationship progresses to this point, they have been talking about different aspects of their relationship recently. As a result, Kristina has been thinking about the future of their relationship.

Whenever Kristina is trying to process information about her important relationships, she likes to write in her journal. The following are some descriptions of John that are excerpted from Kristina's most recent journal entry.

He is a thoughtful guy.

I think he is a charming guy

He uses a negative tone of voice.

John is friendly with people.

He calls me multiple times a day when he knows I am busy.

He gets annoyed if I have to change our plans.

I see him as a family-oriented guy.

He puts down some of my opinions.

He is very understanding.

He is a helpful person.

LEB Consistent/Public

John and Kristina are 20-year-old college students. They are both juniors and they attend the same university. They have been dating for about 10 months. As most couples do when a relationship progresses to this point, they have been talking about different aspects of their relationship recently. As a result, Kristina has been thinking about the future of their relationship.

Whenever Kristina is trying to process information about her important relationships, she likes to talk to her friends. The following are some descriptions of John that are excerpted from Kristina's most recent conversations.

He is a thoughtful guy.

I think he is a charming guy

He uses a negative tone of voice.

John is friendly with people.

He calls me multiple times a day when he knows I am busy.

He gets annoyed if I have to change our plans.

I see him as a family-oriented guy.

He puts down some of my opinions.

He is very understanding.

He is a helpful person.

LEB Inconsistent/Private

John and Kristina are 20-year-old college students. They are both juniors and they attend the same university. They have been dating for about 10 months. As most couples do when a relationship progresses to this point, they have been talking about different aspects of their relationship recently. As a result, Kristina has been thinking about the future of their relationship.

Whenever Kristina is trying to process information about her important relationships, she likes to write in her journal. The following are some descriptions of John that are excerpted from Kristina's most recent journal entry.

He buys me flowers once a week.

He tells corny jokes to make me laugh.

He can be very impolite.

He talks to my friends.

John sometimes acts possessive.

He is inflexible with plans.

He plays with my little brother.

I see him as arrogant.

Understands that this semester is stressful for me

Helps me with my homework.

LEB Inconsistent/Public

John and Kristina are 20-year-old college students. They are both juniors and they attend the same university. They have been dating for about 10 months. As most couples do when a relationship progresses to this point, they have been talking about different aspects of their relationship recently. As a result, Kristina has been thinking about the future of their relationship.

Whenever Kristina is trying to process information about her important relationships, she likes to talk to her friends. The following are some descriptions of John that are excerpted from Kristina's most recent conversations.

He buys me flowers once a week.

He tells corny jokes to make me laugh.

He can be very impolite.

He talks to my friends.

John sometimes acts possessive.

He is inflexible with plans.

He plays with my little brother.

I see him as arrogant.

Understands that this semester is stressful for me

Helps me with my homework.

Appendix B
Survey on Judgments of the Relationship

What are the first words that come to mind as you think about John and Kristina's relationship. Please type one descriptor in each of the boxes below.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of John and Kristina's relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Extremely Bad			Somewhat			Extremely Good

How satisfied is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Extremely

How content is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Extremely

How happy is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Extremely

How committed is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all			Somewhat			Extremely

How frustrated is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not at all   Somewhat   Extremely

How upset is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not at all   Somewhat   Extremely

How angry is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not at all   Somewhat   Extremely

How irritated is Kristina with the relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not at all   Somewhat   Extremely

For the questions on this page, you will be given personality characteristics that could be used to describe Kristina and John. Please use the scale below to indicate the extent to which you think each person has each of the characteristics listed.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Not at all   Somewhat   Extremely

To what extent do you think JOHN has each of the following characteristics? Please use the scale from 1 to 7 for each characteristic.

_____ CARING   _____ DISRESPECTFUL

_____ CONSIDERATE   _____ SELFISH

_____ SUPPORTIVE   _____ IRRITABLE

_____ COMPANIONABLE   _____ COCKY

_____ GENUINE   _____ IRRITABLE

_____ LIKEABLE   _____STUBBORN

_____ KIND   _____ CONCEITED

To what extent do you think KRISTINA has each of the following characteristics? Please use the scale from 1 to 7 for each characteristic.

_____ CARING   _____ DISRESPECTFUL

_____ CONSIDERATE   _____ SELFISH

_____ SUPPORTIVE   _____ IRRITABLE

_____ COMPANIONABLE   _____ COCKY

_____ GENUINE   _____ IRRITABLE

_____ LIKEABLE   _____STUBBORN

_____ KIND   _____ CONCEITED

_____ CHEERFUL   _____ ENTHUSIASTIC

How confident are you that John and Kristina will still be together in 4 months?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Confident			Somewhat			Extremely Confident

How confident are you that John and Kristina will still be together in 1 year?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Confident			Somewhat			Extremely Confident

How confident are you that John and Kristina will still be together after they have graduated?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Confident			Somewhat			Extremely Confident

To what extent do you think that the way that Kristina talks about John is typical in a relationship?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Typical			Somewhat			Extremely Typical

How long have John and Kristina been dating? _____

Where did the provided descriptive excerpts come from?
_____

What is your gender? _____

What is your current age? _____

Are you currently in a romantic relationship?
YES   NO

Are you now or have you ever been in a romantic relationship that you would consider a long-term relationship?
YES   NO

How long do you think two people need to be together for a relationship to be considered long term? _____

Appendix C
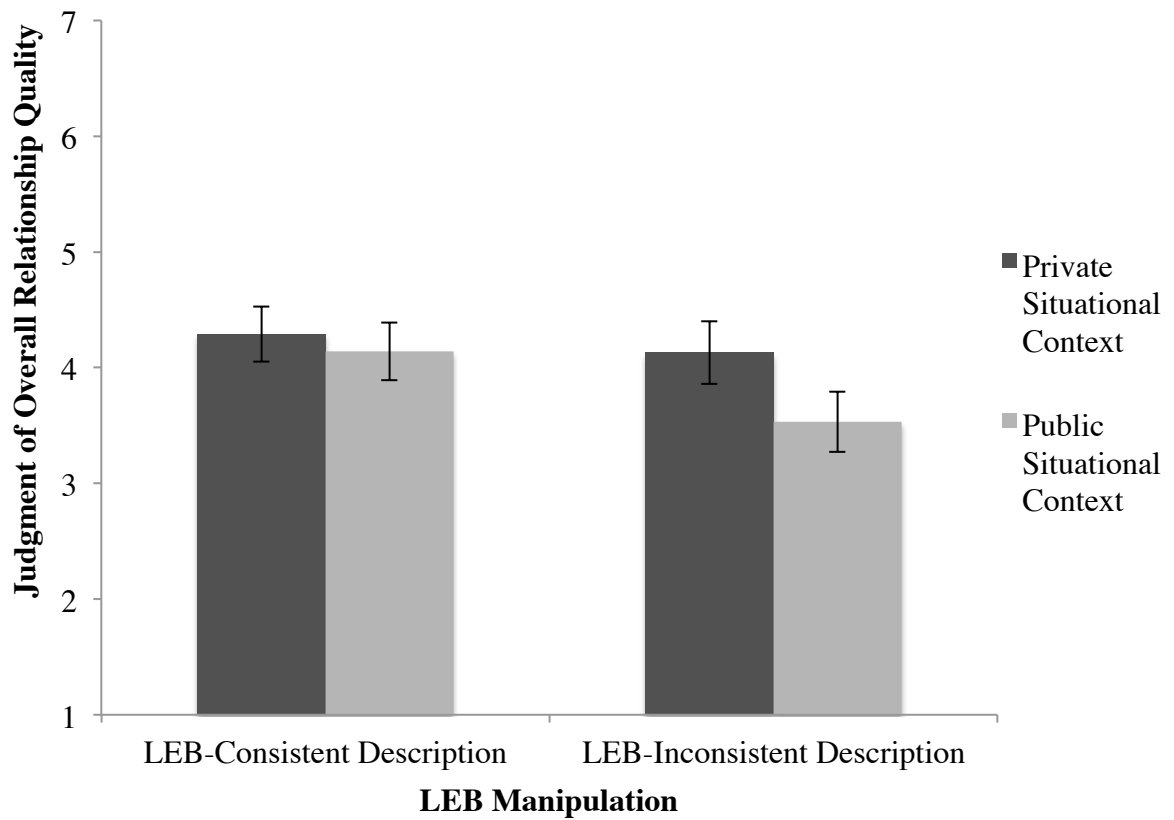
Figure 1. Mean rating for participants' overall judgment of the relationship based on manipulations of the LEB and situational context.. Error bars represent standard error.
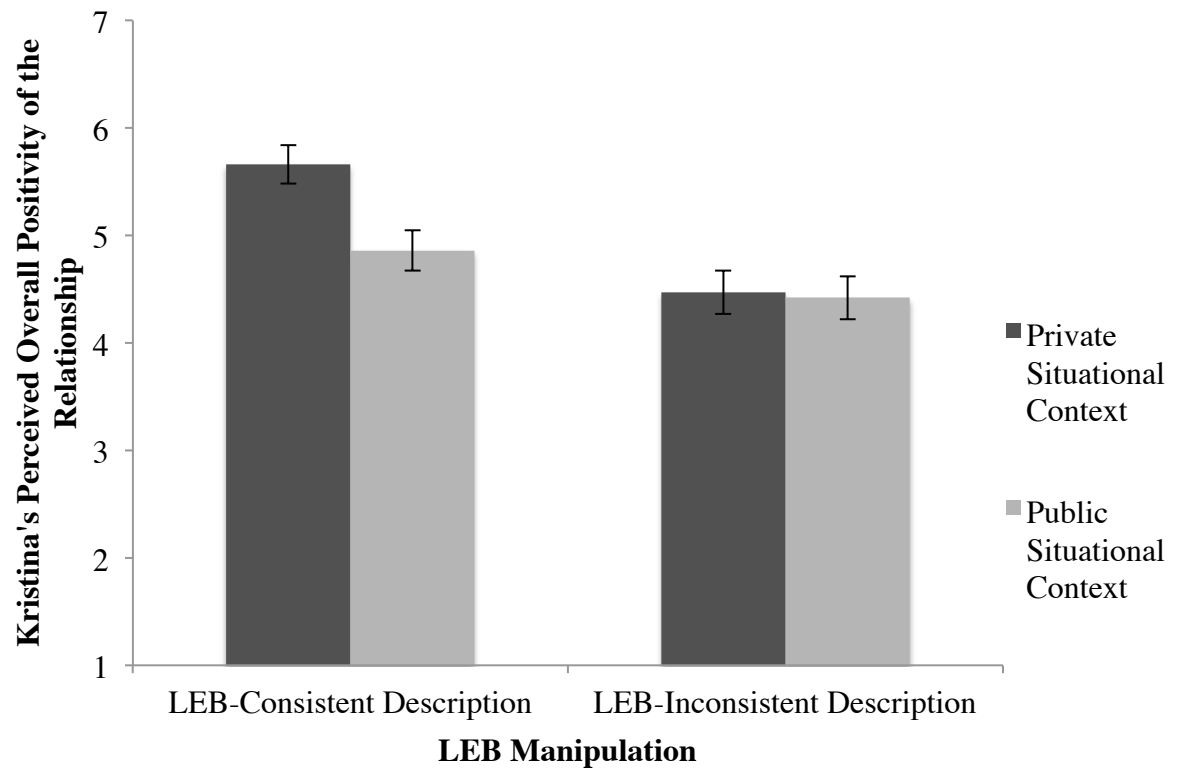
Figure 2. Mean rating for how positive participants perceived the female to feel about her relationship based on manipulations of the LEB and situational context.. Error bars represent standard error.
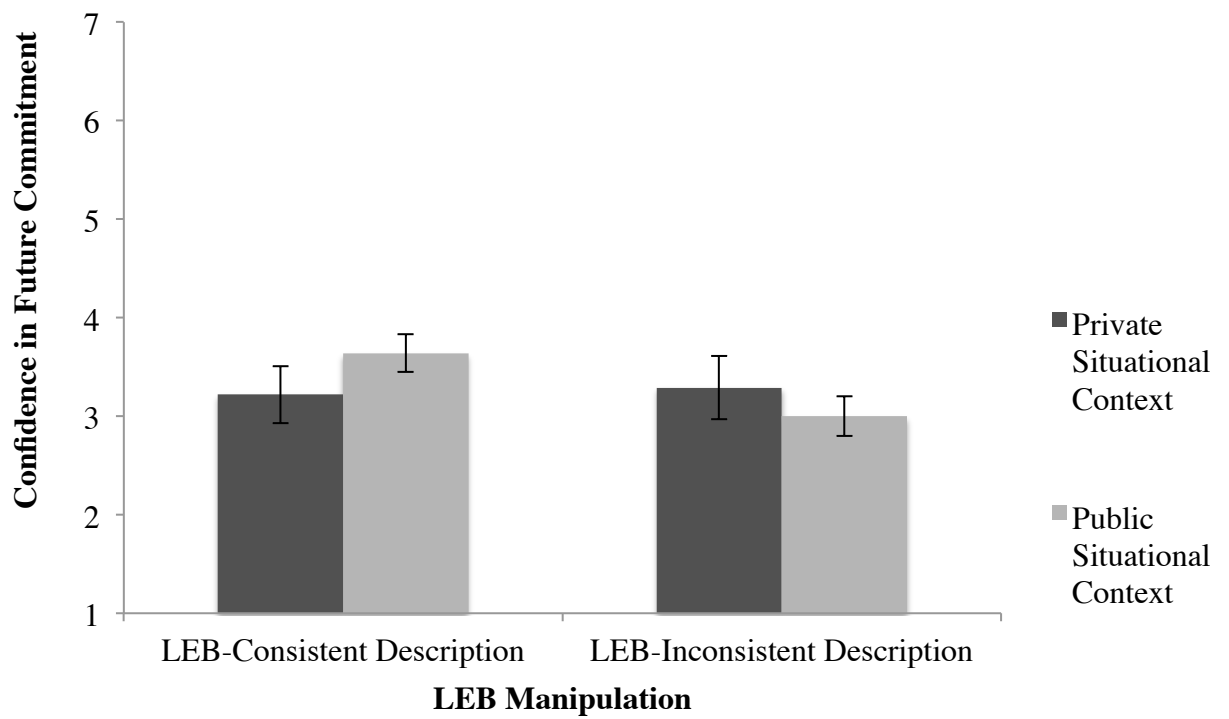
Figure 3. Mean rating for how confident participants were in whether the couple would be together in the future based on manipulations of the LEB and situational context. Error bars represent standard error.
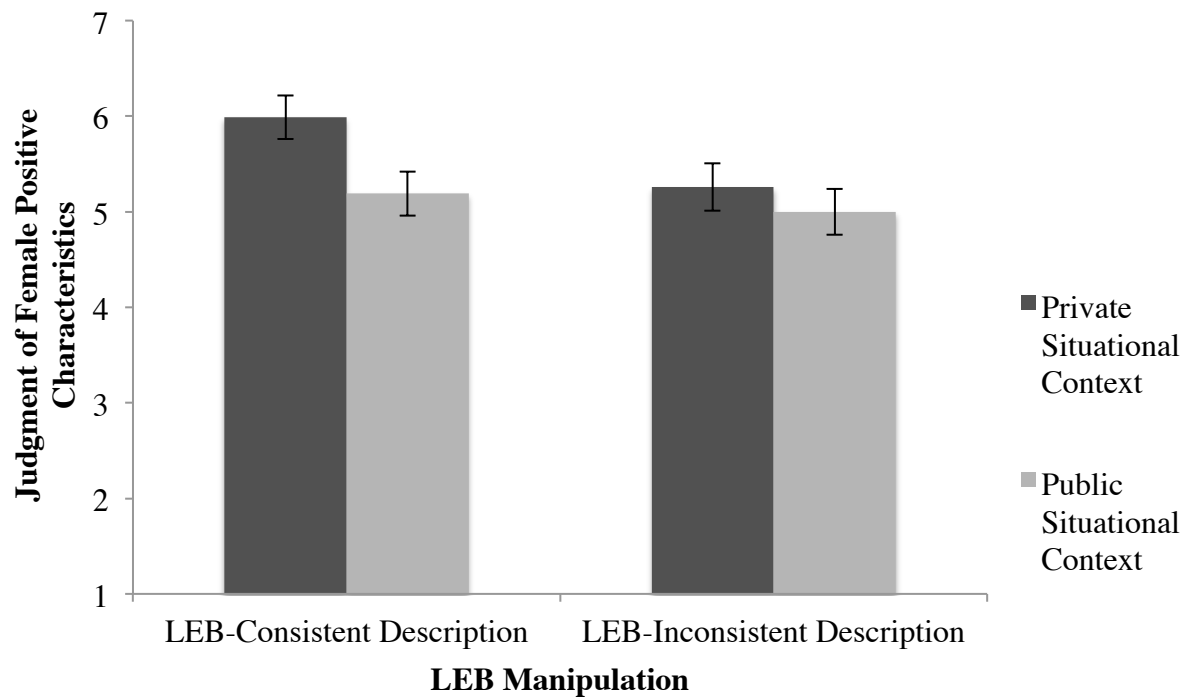
Figure 4. Mean rating for participants rating of female's positive characteristics based on manipulations of the LEB and situational context. Error bars represent standard error.
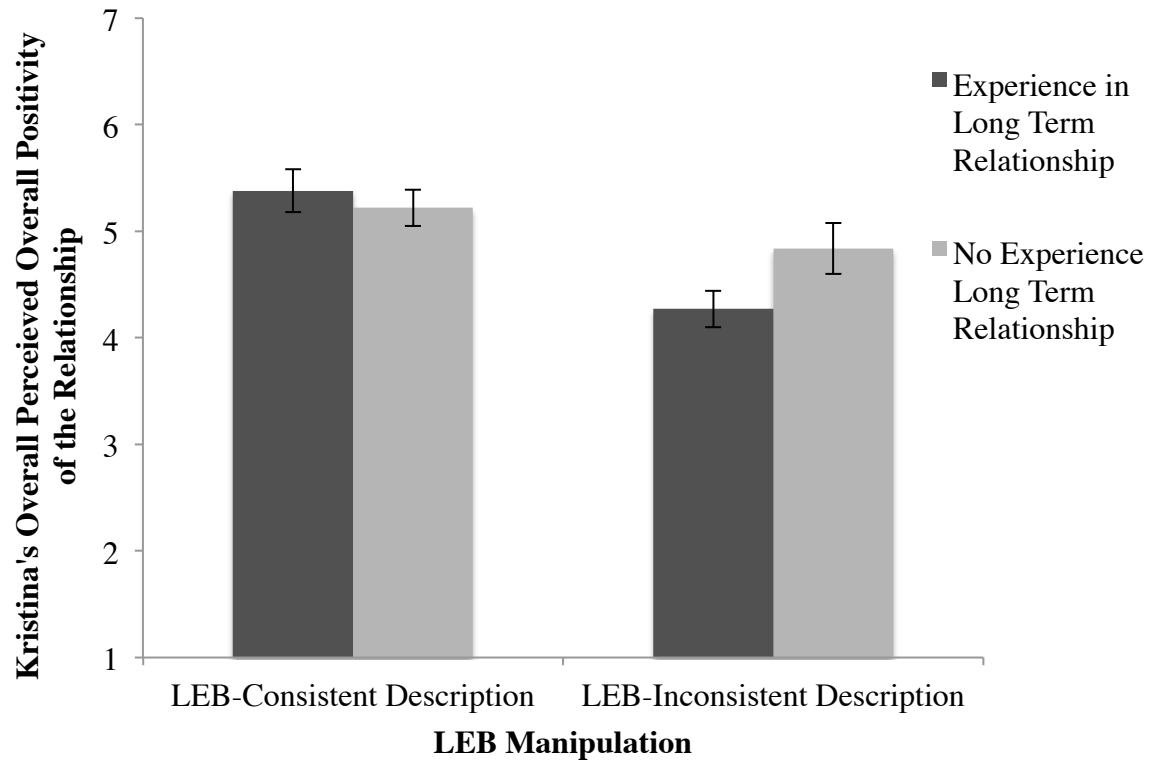
Figure 5. Mean rating for participants' overall judgment of the relationship based on manipulation of the LEB and whether participants have experienced a long-term relationship. Error bars represent standard error.
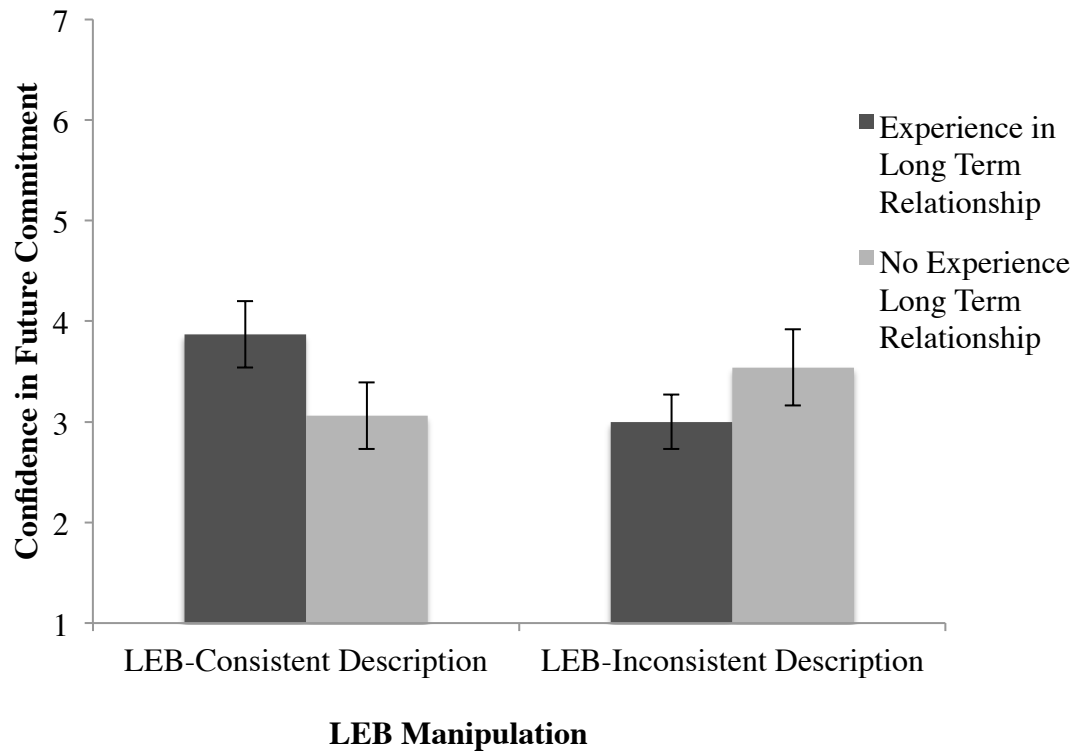
Figure 6. Mean rating for participants' judgment of Kristina's positive feelings with the relationship based on manipulation of the LEB and whether participants have experienced a long-term relationship. Error bars represent standard error.

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