

The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Communications

PERCEPTIONS OF MEDIA INFLUENCE AND SELF-ENHANCEMENT MOTIVATION:
TESTING SELF-ENHANCEMENT EXPLANATION FOR THIRD-PERSON
AND FIRST-PERSON PERCEPTIONS

A Thesis in

Mass Communications

by

Sangki Lee

© 2007 Sangki Lee

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2007

The thesis of Sangki Lee was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Mary Beth Oliver
Professor of Communications
Thesis Adviser
Co-Chair of Committee

Fuyuan Shen
Assistant Professor Communications
Co-Chair of Committee

Shyam Sundar Sethuraman
Professor of Communications

John Christman
Associate Professor of Philosophy and Political Science

John S. Nichols
Professor of Communications
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Research

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

Abstract

The present study explored the self-enhancement explanation for third-person and first-person perceptions in an experimental setting. Three main research questions were examined: (1) the effect of self-motivation on perceptions of media effects; (2) the role of self-esteem in evaluating media influences; and (3) the question of whether people estimate beneficial media influences in ways that are consistent with the ego-enhancive mechanism or the ego-defensive mechanism.

In Experiment 1, self-enhancement motivation was manipulated by threats to self-worth. The literature suggested that threats to self-worth increase self-enhancement needs for securing a positive self-view. To explore this suggestion, participants received either a threat to their cognitive ability or a threat to their sense of compassion. They then evaluated media effects on themselves and media effects on others. Third-person perceptions did not vary by threat to self-worth. However, negative effects on the self decreased as self-esteem increased when participants were under threats. First-person perceptions did not vary by threat to self-worth, either. However, under a threat to sense of compassion, self-esteem level negatively correlated with perceived positive effects on the self and on others, which is consistent with the self-enhancement perspective operating through the ego-defensive mechanism.

In Experiment 2, self-enhancement motivation was compared with self-assessment motivation in terms of their effects on perceptions of media influences. Self-assessment motivation is thought to decrease needs for self-enhancement. To prime self-enhancement motivation (high need for self-enhancement condition) or self-assessment motivation (low need for self-enhancement condition), participants were asked to describe their personal experiences that had led them to satisfy one of both motivations. Third-person and first-person perceptions did not vary by the extent of self-enhancement motivation.

The findings of this suggested that needs for self-enhancement play a role in people's perceptions of media influences. However, people who are high in self-esteem may enhance their positive self-views more evidently than do people who are low in self-esteem. In a first-person perceptions context, it appears that people perceive media influences in a way that is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. Alternative explanations for null findings, implications of significant findings, and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Studies of Third-Person and First-Person Effects.....	6
Explanatory Mechanisms for the Third-Person Effect Hypothesis	8
Attribution theory and the fundamental attribution error	8
Media effects schema.....	10
Self-enhancement explanation	11
Robust third-person perceptions and inconsistent first-person perceptions	14
Manipulating Self-Enhancement Motivations and Threat to Self-Worth.....	17
A possible reason for Meirick’s non-significant findings.....	18
Overcoming limitations	20
Self-esteem and responses to self-threat.....	21
Self-Evaluation, Self-Motivation, and Social Comparison.....	23
Experiment 1	27
Threat to Self-Worth and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages.....	29
Threat to Self-Worth and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages.....	31
The Role of Self-Esteem in the Self-Enhancement Explanation	33
Method	36
Pre-Test: Developing the Instrument.....	36
Main Experiment	37
Sample.....	37
Design	38
Procedures and Materials.....	38
Manipulation of Self-Enhancement Motivation	40
Measures	41
Result	43
Self-Enhancement Motivation and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages	43
Self-Enhancement Motivation and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages.....	44
Response to Threat and Self-Esteem for Negative Messages.....	46
Response to Threat and Self-Esteem for Positive Messages	47
Discussion.....	51
Experiment 2.....	55
The Effects of Self-Motivations on Perceptions of Negative Media Messages	56
The Effects of Self-Motivations on Perceptions of Positive Media Messages.....	59
Method	61
Sample.....	61
Design	61
Procedures and Materials.....	61
Manipulation of Self-Enhancement Motivation	63
Measures	64
Result	65

Self-Motivations and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages	65
Self-Motivations and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages	66
Discussion	68
General Discussion	70
Summary of Findings.....	70
Perceptions of media influences under threat to self-worth.....	70
Self-motivations and perceptions of media influences	73
Self-esteem and perceptions of media influences	74
Ego-enhancive versus ego-defensive mechanism.....	76
Theoretical Implications	76
Self-enhancement explanation for perceptions of media influences	76
The role of self-esteem on perceptions of media influences.....	78
Ego-enhancive versus ego-defensive.....	79
The idea of overestimation and underestimation of media influences	81
Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study.....	82
Sample.....	82
Extreme desirability of messages.....	83
Negative affect as a potential confound.....	84
Additional suggestion for testing the self-enhancement explanation	85
Final Remarks	86
References.....	90
Appendix A: Cognitive Flexibility Test	96
Appendix B: Feedback forms	98
Appendix C: Descriptions and Questionnaires for Measuring Third- and First-Person Perceptions	100

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Desirability of Each Media Message</i>	37
Table 2. <i>Correlations Between Self-Esteem and Perceived Positive Effects on Self, Those on Others, and Self-Other Differences by Threatened Dimension</i>	48
Table 3. <i>Mean Perceived Effects on Self</i>	72

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Regression slopes of self-esteem on positive media effects on the self and those on others under threats to sense of compassion	48
<i>Figure 2.</i> Regression slopes of self-esteem on positive media effects on the self and those on others under threats to cognitive ability	49

Introduction

The basic premise of the third-person effect is that people believe others are more influenced by media messages than they are (Davison, 1983). This effect has been found to be robust when message or media content is perceived as having a negative or socially undesirable influence (Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Innes & Zeith, 1988); however, the effect is lessened—sometimes even reversed into the first-person effect—when media messages are perceived as having a socially desirable or beneficial effect (Chapin, 2000).

Although the third-person effect is well documented, less is known about its possible underlying mechanisms. Recently, researchers have offered several mechanisms to explain the effect: explanations of overestimation and underestimation (Salwen, 1998), media effects schemas (R. M. Perloff, 2002), social distance corollary (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988), and self-enhancement and optimistic bias (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Peiser & Peter, 2001). Among these explanations, the self-enhancement explanation has the potential of defining not only the third-person effect, but also the first-person effect (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Peiser & Peter, 2001). At its foundation, this explanation assumes that an individual can bolster or maintain a positive sense of self by perceiving oneself as more resistant to harmful media influences and more receptive to socially desirable media effects than are others. R. M. Perloff (2002) has summed up this assumption thus: “it is a subset of a universal human tendency to perceive the self in ways that make us look good or at least better than other people” (p. 493). Perhaps it is in part such a view—that takes the self-enhancement explanation as being closely related to what many think of as a “universal human tendency”—that has contributed mightily to it being the most prevailing interpretation for the third-person effect.

Although the self-enhancement explanation has been taken as accounting for both third- and first-person effect phenomena, some research findings challenge its validity (Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Gunther, 1991; McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001). For example, McLeod and his colleagues (2001) prefer attribution theory to self-enhancing bias; they have argued that “attribution theory in general and the fundamental attribution error in particular provide a useful perspective for interpreting third-person perceptions” (p. 691). In particular, they pointed out that, even though many scholars have attempted to extend the self-enhancement bias to explain the reversed third-person effect, they have often found no significant results (Duck & Mullin, 1995; Gunther & Thorson, 1992); further, only a few have found the predicted reversed third-person effect to hold true for pro-social media messages (Gunther & Hwa, 1996).

The self-enhancement explanation provides an intuitively appealing explanation for the third-person effect for undesirable messages, as well as for the reversed third-person effect for desirable messages. Why then is its validity confronted with challenges from other explanatory mechanisms? This question stems from a lack of findings elucidating causal relationships between self-enhancement motivation and the discrepancy in judgments of media impact on the self and others. That is, although many communication scholars have argued that third- and first-person effects could be explained by self-enhancement motivation, they have not tested this idea rigorously in experimental settings (R. M. Perloff, 2002). Furthermore, the self-enhancement motivation has not yet been examined exclusively as an independent variable. It is the case then that third-person effect studies have not clearly suggested a causal relationship between the first-person and third-person effects and self-enhancement motivation.

With the goal of overcoming this limitation of traditional third-person-effect research, the present study designed and conducted two experiments to test the idea that third- and first-person

perceptions are a function of one's self-enhancement motivation. In these experiments, the self-enhancement motivation was experimentally manipulated to examine its effect on people's perceptions of media influences on the self and on others. This research is one of a very few studies that empirically address the role of self-motivation in the context of third- and first-person perceptions. Specifically, the cumulative findings of self-evaluation (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995), self-motivation (Sedikides, 1999; Taylor & Brown, 1988), and self-threat and self-affirmation theories (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983) provide three different ways of manipulating one's enhancement motivation. Such theory-driven manipulations mean this study rigorously tests the self-enhancement explanation—an explanation that, though often cited in the field, has yet to be supported empirically.

The first experiment was conducted based on the research findings of self-threat and self-affirmation theories. The literature suggested that, in the face of threats to their general sense of self-integrity, people develop increased self-enhancing needs for securing a positive sense of self. Based on this suggestion, the present study manipulated a high self-enhancement motivation condition and a low self-enhancement motivation condition to examine how participants evaluate the influences of media messages on themselves and those on others.

In the first experiment, self-enhancement motivation was manipulated using two different methods. The first method threatened cognitive ability in order to increase self-enhancing needs; the second method threatened sense of compassion with the same purpose. Participants' cognitive ability was threatened with two versions of a purported reasoning test and feedback theorem. Participants in the high self-enhancement motivation condition were asked to solve 10 difficult questions and were told they had scored in the bottom 35 % of all students. In contrast, participants in the low self-enhancement motivation condition were asked to solve 10

comparatively easy questions and were told they had scored in the top 15 % of all students. Sense of compassion was threatened by asking participants to write a counter-attitudinal essay as part of a campus survey. Aronson et al. (1995) originally designed this essay test to arouse dissonance in a manner that would threaten participants' sense of compassion. To be more detailed, participants in the high self-enhancement motivation condition were asked to write an essay against funding increases for facilities and services for people with physical disabilities; participants in the low self-enhancement motivation condition were not asked to write an essay.

This experiment also explored the role of self-esteem in determining perceptions of media influences under presence of threat. Brown and Smart (1991) found that people responded to threats to self-worth differently according to their level of self-esteem such that people with high self-esteem find ways to enhance themselves, while those with low self-esteem do not.

Based on given research findings, the first experiment began with the following expectation: to the extent that third- and first-person perceptions are a function of self-enhancement motivation, discrepancies between the perceived media effects on self and those on others would prove greater among those who had been threatened than those who had not been threatened. It was also expected that people with high self-esteem would express greater such discrepancies than those with low self-esteem under the threat to self-worth.

The second experiment had the same purpose as the first experiment, but the approach of the second experiment was different from that of the first. That is, instead of manipulating a high or low self-enhancement motivation directly, the second experiment compared self-enhancement motivation with self-assessment motivation. Taylor et al. (1995) argued that when people attempt to satisfy any given motivation, they exhibit distinct behavioral tendencies. In particular, each self-motivation is likely to function as a motivational impetus for social comparison processes

(Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). When people want to satisfy self-enhancement motivations, for example, they are likely to engage in downward social comparisons; on the other hand, people may make lateral social comparisons to serve self-assessment motivations. Self-assessment motivation is thought to lead people to pursue accurate evaluations of the self by engaging in lateral social comparisons (Sedikides, 1999). That is, if people have a self-assessment motivation, they are likely to choose comparison others whom they see as similar to themselves; such lateral comparisons, in turn, may lead to less pronounced or non-significant third- or first-person perceptions. So, this experiment expected that, if discrepant perceptions of media influences are a function of self-enhancement motivation, self–other differences in terms of perceived media influences would be greater among those who have a self-enhancement motivation primed than those with a self-assessment motivation primed.

Literature Review

Studies of Third-Person and First-Person Effects

It was Davison (1983) who originally defined the third-person effect hypothesis. He proposed that people believe the media's greatest impact "will not be on 'me' or 'you' but on 'them'—the third person" (p. 3). This proposition has been examined in reference to diverse media content, leading to different findings for different types of media message. Research findings suggest that the third-person effect is pervasive when media messages are perceived as having a socially undesirable or negative influence. For example, Gunther and Mundy (1993) found that people perceive messages regarding lottery schemes and diet pills as having socially undesirable influences, and they concluded that other people are more vulnerable to such messages than they are. In contrast, when media messages are viewed as having socially desirable or positive influences, the third-person effect is significantly decreased—sometimes even reversed into the first-person effect. For example, Duck and Mullin (1995) found that people regarded public service announcements on the subjects of using seatbelts and reducing drunk-driving as having a stronger influence on themselves than on others. Similarly, Duck, Terry, and Hogg (1995) found that people who viewed being influenced by AIDS campaigns (that is, a socially desirable message) as desirable perceived themselves as being more influenced than others by the campaigns.

Several studies have examined characteristics of the self as significant moderators of the third-person effect. For example, R. M. Perloff (1999) argued that self-perceived knowledge of a message topic leads people to believe that they are immune to media effects, whereas they believed that other people are vulnerable to those effects. Similarly, Lasorsa (1989) found that self-perceived knowledge instead of real knowledge generated a third-person effect. The extent

to which people think any given media message is important to them or the extent to which they are involved in a media message has been found to moderate third-person perceptions. For example, Mutz (1989) found that the third-person effect was stronger among participants who viewed media messages at hand as being of great importance to them. R. M. Perloff (2002) came to a similar conclusion: in a study of news coverage of the conflict in the Middle East, he found that participants who were highly involved in the message topic were more likely to view the news coverage as having a stronger effect on other people than on themselves.

Several scholars found that the gap between perceived media influences on the self and others increases as “others” are defined in broader and more global terms, that is, when there is a greater social distance between the “self” and “others” (Duck & Mullin, 1995; Gunther, 1991; R. M. Perloff, 2002). For example, Cohen and his colleagues (1988) found that the perceived effect of defamatory news stories was greatest for that of “public opinion,” followed by that of “other Californians,” and “other Stanford students,” and lowest for that of “the self.” Duck and Mullin (1995) also found that the third-person effect is more pronounced when people compare their own vulnerability with that of vague or distant others rather than with specific or close others. These findings are consistent with the notion that vague comparison others facilitate downward social comparisons (R. M. Perloff, 2002). Particularly, when an “average person” was used as a target other, participants tended to evaluate themselves as more immune in comparisons. In these comparisons, “an ‘average person’ may be seen as someone who is, almost by comparisons, less advantaged, less intelligent, and generally worse off than the self” (L. S. Perloff & Fetzer, 1986, p. 503). Thus, such comparisons with vague or distant others may facilitate downward social comparisons (comparisons with those who perform worse than the self), and this facilitated

downward comparison, in turn, may increase the differences between perceived media influences on the self and others.

Explanatory Mechanisms for the Third-Person Effect Hypothesis

R. M. Perloff (2002) suggested that “the centerpiece of the third-person effect is perception and the implicit assumption that perceptions are not fixed at some final Archimedean point, but vary as a function of the gaze of the perceiver (toward others or self)” (p. 492). In an attempt to explain the third-person effect, Salwen (1998) argued that the third-person effect might result from a tendency to underestimate media influence on the self, overestimate media influences on others, or a combination of the two. His argument basically assumes that people tend to perceive media effects on themselves separately from media effects on others. Although this idea alone cannot explain the third-person-effect phenomena, it is helpful for understanding how the components of the third-person effect may operate (McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001). Support for this perspective can be found in recently applied theories, such as attribution theory, which includes the fundamental attribution error (Gunther, 1991; Hoorens & Ruiter, 1996; McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001); media effects schemas (R. M. Perloff, 2002); and self-enhancement motivation explanation, including optimistic bias (Brosius & Engel, 1996; Gunther & Mundy, 1993; Peiser & Peter, 2001). Among these explanations, the self-enhancement explanation has been most frequently used in third-person-effect studies and has the most supporting evidence (R. M. Perloff, 2002).

Attribution theory and the fundamental attribution error. Several scholars have attempted to explain third-person perceptions by using attribution theory and the fundamental attribution error (Gunther, 1991; Hoorens & Ruiter, 1996; McLeod, Detenber, & Eveland, 2001).

Attribution theory assumes that when people need to make causal attributions for their own

behaviors and those of others, they draw distinctions between dispositional, internal causes, and situational, external causes. Heider (1958) stated that “a person tends to attribute his own reactions to the object world, and those of another, when they differ from his own, to personal characteristics” (p. 157). This initial premise has spawned many studies focusing on the “fundamental attribution error.” Jones and Nisbett (1971) explained the fundamental attribution error phenomenon by stating that people attribute causal attribution of behaviors of the self to external or situational factors, whereas they attribute the behaviors of others to internal or dispositional causes. However, several studies have found that people do not consistently attribute their own behavior to situational factors (Chen, Yates, & McGinnies, 1988; Miller & Steinberg, 1975). The difference in how people understand their own behavior inheres in whether their outcomes are positive or negative. For example, Chen et al. (1988) have argued that people tend to attribute their own positive outcomes to dispositional or internal factors, but they tend to attribute their own negative outcomes to situational or external causes. This tendency may be understood as one of self-serving bias. That is, people tend to attribute their behavior to different factors depending on whether the outcome is positive or negative; thus, the person both takes credit for success and avoids responsibility for failure.

Applying attribution theory and the fundamental attribution error to the third-person effect, Hoorens and Ruiter (1996) suggested that people may attribute the perceived stronger media influence on others to dispositional factors (e.g., gullibility), while they may attribute the perceived weaker media influence on themselves to situational causes (e.g., persuasive intent of messages). For example, people may perceive a greater media influence on other people than on themselves because they think other people are less responsive to the situational character of media messages (e.g., persuasive intent) than they are. Gunther (1991) describes this tendency

thus: “when judging the impact of the message on others, observers will underestimate the effect of situational (external) factors and attribute relatively more opinion change to others; but in judging themselves, observers will observe modest, if any, opinion change, attributing it to their greater awareness of, and discounting of, situational factors like persuasive intent” (p. 357). However, these expectations seem odd in using the fundamental attribution error for third-person perceptions without considering how people evaluate their own and others’ outcomes as positive or negative. The central notion of the third-person-effect hypothesis is that people tend to think others are more vulnerable to negative or harmful media messages than they are (Davison, 1983). Inherent in this notion is the tacit assumption that people think that they can avoid negative influences of media messages, but other people cannot do so. If this is the case, third-person perception may, in fact, be a combined evaluation of one’s positive outcomes (successful avoidance of negative media influences) and others’ negative outcomes (unsuccessful avoidance of the same influences). The fundamental attribution error assumes that (1) people tend to attribute both their positive outcomes and others’ negative outcomes to internal causes; and (2) they attribute their negative and others’ positive outcomes to external causes. According to the fundamental attribution error, people tend to draw such conclusions because the result is the enhancement of the self. Thus, in order to explain third-person perception by the fundamental attribution error, third-person-effect scholars must attribute a perceiver’s own successful avoidance of media influence to dispositional causes (e.g., smartness) instead of situational factors (e.g., persuasive intent).

Media effects schema. A media effects schema refers to a set of simple beliefs that ordinary people have about mass media and their effects. By using the idea of media effects schema, several communication scholars have attempted to explain third-person perceptions.

Rather than directly comparing oneself to comparison others in estimating media effects, these scholars contend that people evaluate themselves separately from others. For example, R. M. Perloff (1996) argued that people use a media effects schema that identifies media as being very powerful and influential. However, because it is not easy for people to be aware of their own psychological vulnerability and functioning, they rarely perceive the media's influence on themselves (R. M. Perloff, 2002). In determining whether others are affected by a message, people tend to adopt a naïve notion that "exposure equals a direct effect" (Eveland & McLeod, 1999, p. 330). For Eveland et al. (1999), a media effects schema resembles the "hypodermic" model of media effects. In explaining the target corollary, Eveland and his colleagues (1999) argued that people seem to be using a simple heuristic to make interpretations: People tend to believe that if others are exposed to media messages, they will then automatically be influenced. A media effects schema focused on the power of the media and people's unawareness of their own psychological vulnerability may explain third-person perceptions particularly through overestimation of media influence on other people. However, this notion appears insufficient for explaining reversed third-person perceptions, wherein others are seen as less influenced by media messages than is the self.

Self-enhancement explanation. R. M. Perloff (2002) suggests that the self-enhancement explanation is the most prevailing interpretation for third-person perceptions. According to him, self-enhancing desire is "a subset of a universal human tendency to perceive the self in ways that make us look good or at least better than other people" (p. 493). So, third- and first-person effects could be understood as part of a universal human tendency to think one is better than others in terms of being able to resist negative media influences and receive positive media influences.

The belief that “I am better than others” could be maintained in several ways, including overly optimistic biases (Weinstein, 1980), downward social comparisons (Wills, 1991), and a wide variety of self-serving attribution and information-processing patterns (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Taylor & Brown, 1988). For example, Taylor and Brown (1988) argued that psychological illusions—including “overly positive views of the self,” “exaggerated perceptions of personal control,” and “unrealistic optimism”—can serve to maintain or enhance a perceiver’s positive self-view (p. 193). Such psychological illusions have been reported as prevailing characteristics of normal human belief systems (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Taylor & Brown, 1988); further, they offer plausible explanations for the third-person- and first-person-effects phenomena in regard to both negative and positive media messages.

Lewicki (1983) argued that when people have overly positive views of themselves, they tend to focus on their positive qualities when evaluating others, thereby assuring favorable self-other comparisons. Such comparisons lead people to think that they are smart enough to see through negative messages, while other people are not. In addition, incorporating the notion of unrealistic optimism or optimistic bias, third-person perceptions may result from beliefs that negative events (e.g., being influenced by harmful media messages) are less likely to happen to the self than to others. Unrealistic optimism or optimistic bias pertains to people’s beliefs that, compared to others, they are more likely to experience positive events and less likely to experience negative events in the future (Weinstein, 1980). Applying such perspectives to third-person perceptions, Gunther and Mundy (1993) argued that “the optimistic bias would predict that people think others are more vulnerable to harmful influences of pornography, less resistant to the coercion of product advertisements, more susceptible to false information and its misleading effect on opinion, and less able to see through the misinformation, or disinformation,

in biased news. And indeed, such outcomes accurately summarize past research on the third-person effect” (p. 60). The perspective of exaggerated perceptions of personal control is also useful for explaining the third-person effect. Taylor and Brown (1988) argued that people’s belief in personal control is sometimes greater than can be justified. People often act as if they have control in situations that are actually determined by chance (Langer & Roth, 1975). Thus, to maintain a positive sense of the self, people tend to believe that they have greater control over media influences than do others by evaluating themselves as more resistant to negative media influences than are others.

The notion of psychological illusions is also plausible as an explanation of the first-person effect in regard to socially desirable media messages. With overly positive views of the self, people make favorable comparisons with others: “I am smart enough to understand and accept desirable influences of media messages, but others are not.” And with unrealistic optimism, people believe that positive events, such as being influenced by desirable media messages, are more likely happen to them than to others. However, the illusion of or need for control may lessen the magnitude of the reversed third-person effect. Because accepting the influences of media messages regardless of the message’s desirability means giving up one’s control over one’s attitude, people may resist the idea that they are influenced by even desirable media messages. Regarding the importance of the need for control, Fiske (2003) suggested that when people are motivated to predict and control their own outcomes, and if they do so effectively, they survive better because they control the means of survival. Moreover, to the extent that people consistently feel they are in control, they may be healthier, feel happier, and live longer (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Thus, feeling a loss of personal control by accepting the influences of media messages on the self is likely to result in experiencing a negative view of the

self to such an extent that ill health, unhappiness, even a shorter life expectancy, result. If this is the case, the notion of personal control or self-determination may explain why several studies have found less pronounced or non-significant third-person perceptions, instead of significant first-person perceptions, in regard to socially desirable messages.

Robust third-person perceptions and inconsistent first-person perceptions. Prior studies that have examined people's perceptions of socially undesirable messages have found robust third-person perceptions (R. M. Perloff, 2002). However, the studies regarding first-person perceptions for socially desirable messages have found mixed results. For example, some studies have found significant first-person perceptions (Chapin, 2000; Duck & Mullin, 1995); some studies have reported significant third-person perceptions (Gunther & Mundy, 1993); and several other studies have found neither significant first-person nor significant third-person perceptions (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). Although individuals' prevailing motivation to view the self as favorably as possible seems theoretically appealing as an explanation for both perceptions, the question remains: Why have studies reported inconsistent results regarding people's perceptions of socially desirable media influences on the self and on others?

Duck and Mullin (1995) provided useful insights to account for such inconsistent findings in regard to socially desirable or positive media messages. They argued that, under the self-enhancement explanation, the first-person-effect hypothesis could be defined by some forms of self-serving biases that cause an individual to compare oneself favorably to others for either ego-enhancing or ego-defensive needs. By satisfying either one or the other need, people can successfully bolster their sense of the self positively and fulfill their self-enhancement motivations. However, based on which need people want to satisfy in estimating positive media influences, people may report first-person perceptions, third-person perceptions, or non-

significant perceptions. Regarding such variation in the perceptions of media influences, Duck and Mullin (1995) argued that two types of perspective define self-enhancement motivations: the ego-enhancive perspective and the ego-defensive perspective. These perspectives predict different patterns in people's perceptions of socially desirable media messages.

In the case of explaining discrepancies in perceptions of positive media influences, the ego-enhancive perspective of self-enhancement motivation predicts that people will estimate greater positive media influences on themselves than on others—that is, first-person perceptions (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). This perspective is consistent with the notion of overly positive views of the self and optimistic bias. For example, people want to make favorable comparisons with others in order to maintain their positive view of the self, and they believe they will experience more positive life events than will others; therefore, they are likely to think they are able to accept positive media influences but others are not. Based on this reasoning, the ego-enhancive perspective assumes that people tend to overestimate positive media influences on the self and underestimate the same influences on others; such discrepant estimations lead people to show first-person perceptions. In contrast, the ego-defensive perspective of self-enhancement motivation predicts that people will not estimate greater positive media influences on themselves than on others. Duck and Mullin (1995) argued that people who have ego-defensive needs maintain a positive self-conception by viewing themselves as resistant to any media influences regardless of message desirability. For such people, accepting any influence from media messages means giving up control over their attitudes and, consequently, threatens their positive self-view. Therefore, instead of estimating greater positive media influences on the self than on others, people may make the evaluation that they and others are equally uninfluenced by positive media messages (non-significant third-person perceptions), or they may estimate that others

rather than themselves are somewhat more influenced by the positive messages (less pronounced third-person effect). Given such reasoning, Eveland and McLeod (1999) argued that the ego-defensive perspective could explain less pronounced or non-significant third-person perceptions as have been found in previous third-person-effect studies.

The ego-defensive perspective is different from the ego-enhancive perspective in its assumptions regarding how people estimate media influences on the self. In other words, the ego-defensive perspective assumes that people underestimate all media influences on the self, whereas the ego-enhancive perspective of self-enhancement motivation supposes that people overestimate media influences on the self when the influences are perceived as positive and underestimate media influences when the influences are perceived as negative. Therefore, for negative media messages, both perspectives predict the same pattern of perception. That is, both perspectives commonly assume that people who have self-enhancement motivations tend to underestimate negative media influences on the self, and such underestimation, in turn, is likely to lead people to assume stronger negative media influences on others than on the self. In contrast, those perspectives predict different patterns for people's perceptions of positive media messages. That is, the ego-enhancive perspective assumes first-person perceptions, whereas the ego-defensive perspective supposes less pronounced or non-significant third-person perceptions. The current experimental study examined which perspective is better able to explain people's perceptions in regard to media influences perceived as positive.

Manipulating Self-Enhancement Motivations and Threat to Self-Worth

The frameworks of threat to self-worth and self-affirmation in social psychology may provide the means for empirical tests of the self-enhancement explanation (Meirick, 2002). The literature suggests that threats to self-worth lead people to have increased self-enhancing needs motivating them to affirm the aspects of themselves they value (Brown & Smart, 1991; Steele, 1988). Based on such findings, it is possible to examine how people evaluate media influences on themselves and others in the light of manipulations designed to induce increases in self-enhancement motivation.

With the focus on dissonance phenomena under the rubric of self-esteem maintenance, Steele (1988) found that, when there is a threat to one's self-worth, one's self-enhancing needs increase in order to secure a positive sense of self. Based on such findings, Meirick (2002) attempted to test the self-enhancement explanation for third-person perceptions. Specifically, he hypothesized that increased self-enhancing needs caused by a threat to self-worth may expand the self–other gap in terms of perceived media influences. To test this hypothesis, Meirick (2002) manipulated the need for self-enhancement by giving his participants false feedback regarding their cognitive ability. Participants in the threat-to-self-worth condition were asked to solve 10 of the most difficult questions from the Remote Associates Test¹; they were then told that they had not performed very well, scoring in the 35th percentile among all college students. In contrast, participants in the non-threat condition were asked to solve 10 of the easiest questions; they were then informed that they had performed very well, scoring in the 85th percentile. After receiving false feedback, all participants were asked to answer third-person and first-person questionnaires. However, although Meirick's manipulation of self-enhancing needs seems consistent with

¹ Mednick (1962) originally designed the Remote Associates Test to measure people's creativity. For each question, subjects were presented with three words (e.g., "sea," "home," and "stomach") and were asked to find a fourth word that related to the other three (e.g., "sick").

Steele's original idea of self-threat (Steele, 1988), his hypothesis was not supported. He found that third-person perceptions did not vary by threat condition. In his examination, participants in the self-threat condition were not different in this regard from other participants in the non-self-threat condition.

A possible reason for Meirick's non-significant findings. In explicating his threat to self-worth and self-affirmation theory, Steele (1988) argued that when dissonance is aroused by threats to one's general sense of integrity, people can effectively respond to these threats by affirming some valued aspects of their self-concept that are not necessarily related to the threats. The means of self-affirmation may be determined by availability, that is, the degree to which a given adaptation is accessible in the individual's perception, memory, or imagination, and among equally available adaptations, by perceptions of their relative effectiveness-to-cost ratios. Regarding the availability of means for self-affirmation, Steele (1988) argued that, even when readily available, a given adaptation may be rejected because it is seen as ineffective or too costly in terms of time or resources. For example, "although I may experience a highly available, compensatory impulse to help with dishes after arriving late at the Fathers-and-Sons banquet, because of the perceived costs, I might wind up seeking an easier route to affirmation, perhaps donating more to the benefit drive" (Steele, 1988, pp. 293-294). In support of this view of dissonance, Aronson et al. (1995) explored whether the attractiveness of a given affirmation depends on its relevance to the threatened domain of the self-concept. They found that when faced with a threat to a specific self-conception, people tended to forgo affirmations within the threatened self-concept domain in favor of affirmation from unrelated, compensatory domains. Specifically, they argued that, if one receives a low score on a purportedly valid test of artistic creativity, filling out a measure of aesthetic values might be less self-affirming than focusing on

one's honesty. Thus, they suggest that focusing on an aspect of the self-concept impugned by behavior dissonant with that self-concept should offer little relief from the dilemma, whereas focusing on unrelated strengths and values may more effectively reaffirm the integrity of the threatened self, because it does not invoke standards that may underscore the perception of threat. In line with this reasoning, there is evidence that people respond to threats to a specific self-concept domain by inflating their self-presentation in an unrelated, rather than a related domain (Brown & Smart, 1991). In Brown and Smart's (1991) study, participants were asked to solve one of two different sets of the Remote Associates Test (one set comprised 10 difficult questions and the other set comprised 10 easy questions). The participants were told either that they had performed very well on the test, scoring in the top 15% of all students (success condition), or that they had not performed very well, scoring in the bottom 30% of all students (failure condition). After giving the participants such false feedback regarding their cognitive ability, the researchers asked the participants to indicate how well 12 adjectives described them using a 7-point rating scale. Half of the items pertained to qualities and attributes relevant to the interpersonal or social domain (i.e., sincere, loyal, kind, insensitive, inconsiderate, and insincere); the other half referred to achievement-related attributes (i.e., intelligent, smart, competent, unwise, unimaginative, and incompetent). Self-esteem was also measured to examine the effect of interactions between levels of self-esteem and outcomes (success and failure) on the evaluation of attribute types (social or interpersonal attributes or achievement-related attributes). Brown and Smart (1991) found that people who had high self-esteem (HSE), but not people who had low self-esteem (LSE), responded to failure at an achievement task by exaggerating their social qualities; they did not exaggerate their achievement-related attributes that had been threatened by the negative

false feedback. In the case of LSE subjects, self-ratings of social attributes were more negative after failure than after success, whereas the reverse was true for HSE subjects.

It is important to note that HSE as well as LSE subjects did not deny the feedback they received or its specific implications for their achievement-related attributes. Nor did they attempt to dismiss their poor performance by exalting their achievement-related attributes. However, HSE subjects did attempt to make up for their negative achievement performance by actively exaggerating positive perceptions of their social qualities, whereas LSE subjects did not exaggerate those perceptions either.

These research findings may explain why Meirick (2002) failed to support the idea that amplified self-enhancing needs (resulting from threatening participants' cognitive ability by using a negative false feedback) increase third-person perceptions. That is, if the participants in Meirick's (2002) study thought that their ability to discern negativity in harmful media messages and to resist such negativity was related to their cognitive ability, their poor performance on the test purportedly measuring their cognitive ability could prevent them from attempting to show their superiority over a comparison target in terms of resistance to harmful media influences. Indeed, Meirick (2002) found that the extent of third-person perceptions did not vary by threat to participants' cognitive ability. In other words, the differences between perceived harmful media effects on the self and those on others were virtually the same between participants who were threatened and those who were unthreatened.

Overcoming limitations. As Brown and Smart (1991) and Aronson et al. (1995) found, when people are confronted with a threat to a specific self-concept, they can effectively respond by affirming some valued aspects of the self within unrelated and compensatory domains rather than by affirming valued aspects within the threatened domain.

Given these research findings, it is reasonable to anticipate that if people's sense of compassion is threatened, they may more effectively cope with such threats by exalting third-person perceptions. That is, because people in this case are likely to think of compassion as being unrelated to cognitive ability—specifically the ability to discern negativity in messages in this case—they may enhance their self-view more effectively by expressing that they are more resistant to harmful media influences than are comparison others.

Self-esteem and responses to self-threat. Although much of the work on self-enhancement is predicated on the assumption that this motivation is universal (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995), there are individual differences in the extent to which people either exercise or are subject to it. For example, Brown and Gallagher (1992) suggested that a tendency to self-enhance would be most characteristic of people with high self-esteem. They argued that people with high self-esteem tend to actively cope with failure, while those with low self-esteem tend to accept it (Brown & Gallagher, 1992). Those designated as having high self-esteem (HSE) are more likely than those designated as having low self-esteem (LSE) to claim more responsibility for success than failure (Campbell, 1986). People with HSE, as compared to people with LSE, evaluate their performance more positively, even when their performance is equivalent to that of those with LSE (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Numerous investigations have found that people who have high HSE and people with LSE diverge in their responses to negative outcomes (Brown, 1990). Campbell (1986) argued that differences in regard to self-esteem come to the fore when people are responding to events that threaten their self-worth. For example, Brown and Smart (1991) found that, after failure at a so-called cognitive ability test, HSE subjects overstated their social attributes. In contrast, LSE subjects denigrated their social attributes after the failure. Hence, whether subjects rated their

social attributes as strong or weak after experiencing a threat to self-worth (failure at the cognitive ability test) depended on whether their self-esteem level was correspondingly high or low. This finding is consistent with that of Brown (1990), that people with HSE adopt more active efforts to offset negative outcomes than do people with LSE.

These propensities in regard to self-esteem suggest that a threat to self-worth has some positive consequences for the self-perception of people with HSE (instead of people with LSE); therefore, there are implications for our understanding of first- and third-person perceptions in regard to self-esteem. That is, in a third-person perceptions context, people with HSE may perceive themselves as more resistant to harmful media influence than may people with LSE because resistance to harmful influences is a valued trait. In contrast, in a first-person perceptions context, people with HSE are likely to perceive themselves as being more receptive to beneficial media influences than do LSE people because receptiveness to beneficial influences is a valued aspect of the self.

A few recent studies have explored correlations between the third-person effect and self-esteem. These correlations are relevant to the self-enhancement explanation because those with high self-esteem are thought to use self-enhancement mechanisms more than those with low self-esteem. However, findings have been inconsistent.

David and Johnson (1998) examined the third-person effect of media images of perfect bodies and found a stronger third-person effect for people with high self-esteem. But Chapin (2000) found a non-significant negative correlation ($r = -.14$) between self-esteem and the perception that others were more affected than oneself. Banning (2001) hypothesized that self-esteem would have a positive linear relationship with the third-person effect; however, he found no such relationship. He also expected to find a curvilinear relationship in which those with the

highest self-esteem would exhibit a weaker third-person effect than those who scored just moderately high; however, that relationship failed to materialize.

Meirick (2003) also attempted to test the relationship between self-esteem and the strength of third-person and first-person perceptions. Although he failed to support it, he did offer this useful initial hypothesis: that is, among people who are threatened, high-self-esteem subjects would show stronger third-person perceptions for negative media messages than would low-self-esteem subjects; in addition, HSE subjects would show stronger first-person perceptions than would LSE subjects for positive media messages.

The present study focuses on supporting those hypotheses again with similar theoretical reasoning to that proposed by Meirick. However, as mentioned earlier, the way of manipulating self-enhancement motivation is different from that of Meirick. By threatening one's sense of compassion instead of one's cognitive ability, this study expected that participants with high self-esteem may be able to cope with a given threat to their cognitive ability more easily or effectively by affirming that they are superior to other people in terms of resistance to negative media influences and receptiveness to positive media influences. This way of manipulation is likely to have an advantage over Meirick's approach. That is, because a sense of compassion is not related to the ability to discern negativity in media messages but one's cognitive ability is related so, people may be able to affirm their good attribute (resistance to negative influences and receptiveness to positive influences) more effectively when the threat is to their sense of compassion than when the threat is to their cognitive ability.

Self-Evaluation, Self-Motivation, and Social Comparison

Studies focusing on self-evaluation and self-motivation provide another approach to empirically testing the self-enhancement explanation. In general, research in this area suggests

that the self-enhancement motivation leads people to view themselves in a self-enhancing light, but that self-assessment motivation leads people to perceive themselves in an unbiased way. Therefore, it is expected that people with the self-enhancement motivation are likely to perceive themselves favorably by thinking that they are better than a comparison target in terms of resisting harmful media influences as well as receiving beneficial media influences. In contrast, people with the self-assessment motivation are expected to perceive that they are not superior over a comparison target in these regards.

People usually think of self-evaluation as a major concern across the life span, and self-evaluation, in turn, is likely to lead to a well defined (i.e., structurally sound and stable) self-concept (Sedikides, 1993). Self-evaluation is not thought of as an aimless process, but rather as one directed by self-motivation (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). A number of scholars have suggested that self-assessment, self-enhancement, and self-verification are important motivations that guide self-evaluation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Sedikides, 1999). According to Sedikides (1999), self-evaluation can be accomplished by any of three primary routes: (a) the objective and accurate gathering and appraisal of self-relevant information, (b) the positive appraisal of self-relevant information to enhance positive self-conceptions, or (c) the affirmation of preexisting self-conceptions. These three routes manifest the influences of three respective motivations: self-assessment, self-enhancement, and self-verification.

Among the three primary routes of the self-evaluation process, the self-enhancement motivation is thought to explain third-person perceptions. As an explanatory mechanism of third-person perceptions, the self-enhancement explanation suggests that the third-person effect is a subset of universal human tendencies to evaluate oneself as better than others in a self-serving biased manner (Duck & Mullin, 1995). This tendency leads people to perceive themselves rather

than others as more resistant to socially undesirable messages; these discrepant perceptions of negative media influences on the self and on others, in turn, are thought to play a role in enhancing and maintaining one's positive self-conception (R. M. Perloff, 2002).

In the past, many studies have attempted to determine which self-motivation is more powerful in guiding individuals' behaviors. Research evidence posited that individuals try to satisfy different motivations across different circumstances (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). People sometimes attempt to satisfy a single self-motivation; sometimes, they attempt to satisfy multiple self-motivations simultaneously. For example, Taylor (1991) suggested that in contrast to positive events, negative events disproportionately draw off resources of all kinds (psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social); thus, negative events intensify self-evaluation needs. In this case, more than one self-motivation can be aroused simultaneously. Taylor et al. (1995) argued that when people attempt to satisfy any given motivation, they exhibit distinct behavioral tendencies as a result of the specific motivation. For example, when people have a high self-enhancement motivation, they tend to make downward social comparisons rather than upward social comparisons in order to feel better about themselves (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995).

Self-motivation and social comparison processes are closely related to each other. In particular, each self-motivation is likely to function as a motivational impetus for social comparison processes; and social comparison processes are often the result of self-motivations (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). For example, when people want to satisfy self-enhancement motivations, they are likely to engage in downward social comparisons, whereas people may make lateral social comparisons to serve self-assessment motivations. For satisfying self-verification motivations, people tend to engage in lateral or downward comparisons more

frequently than upward social comparisons (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). Such relationships between self-motivation and social comparison may prove useful in addressing the third-person-effect hypothesis. Individuals satisfy different self-motivations across different conditions (Brown, 1990; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995) by using distinct behavioral tendencies (e.g., upward, lateral, and downward social comparisons) (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). In addition, based on the self-motivation to be fulfilled, people may differently estimate media influences on themselves and on others as a result of a distinct comparison process. In particular, self-enhancement motivations are clearly different from self-assessment motivations in terms of their different behavioral tendencies—and such different behavioral tendencies would each be expected to exert a distinctive impact on people’s estimates of media influence. For example, if people engage in downward social comparisons as a result of self-enhancement motivations, they are more likely to amplify the differences in perceived negative media influence on the self versus others because they consider the comparison targets—“others” in this case—as generally “less able” than they are. In contrast, when people make lateral social comparisons as a result of self-assessment motivations, they are less likely to exaggerate the differences in perceived media influence on the self versus others because comparison targets are perceived as similar to themselves in terms of personal qualities, attributes, or outcomes.

Based on the literature focusing on self-motivation and social comparison, this experiment explored the plausibility of the self-enhancement explanation for third-person and first-person perception phenomena. This experiment predicted that people with self-enhancement motivation would show greater self–other differences in terms of perceived media influences on the self and others than would people with self-assessment motivation.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 had two goals. First, this experiment tested the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions in an experimental setting. This test focused on examining two effects: the main effect of self-enhancement motivation; and the interaction between self-enhancement motivation and self-esteem on people's perceptions of media influences under threat to self-worth. In examining the main effect and the interaction, this experiment additionally explored the possible moderating effect of threatened dimensions of self-worth (cognitive ability or sense of compassion). Second, this experiment sought to determine which perspective—the ego-enhancing or ego-defensive perspective of the self-enhancement explanation—would better explain first-person perceptions.

The self-enhancement motivation was manipulated using two different methods. The first method threatened cognitive ability in order to increase self-enhancing needs; the second method threatened sense of compassion with the same purpose. By employing both methods in one experiment, this experiment could examine how the threatened dimensions moderate perceptions of media influence. As mentioned in the literature review, the present study pointed out a possible limitation of Meirick's (2002) manipulation; that is, because a threat to cognitive ability might have prevented his participants from affirming their superiority over a comparison target in terms of ability to discern negativity or positivity in media messages, Meirick might not have found significant differences between the threat (high self-enhancement motivation) and the non-threat (low self-enhancement motivation) conditions. Indeed, he found that perceived negative effects on self, those on the comparison other, and the difference between these two perceived effects did not vary by threat to cognitive ability in regard to negative media messages. He also found that the participants who were threatened rather than those who were unthreatened

considered themselves less affected by positive media messages, although he had hypothesized the opposite direction (Meirick, 2002). However, the present study does offer a way of compensating for this possible limitation. The present study takes its cue from Aronson et al.'s (1995) suggestion that when dissonance is aroused by a specific self-threat to self-conception, people will act in this way: they will forego affirmation within the threatened self-concept domain in favor of affirmation in unrelated or compensatory domains. Following this cue, the present study theorized that attacking a person's sense of compassion might be sufficient to overcome the limitation of Meirick's method. That is, because a threatened sense of compassion is not related to the ability to discern harmfulness in messages, people may respond to a threat of that type effectively by thinking that they are more resistant to negative media influences than are comparison others. So, examining the data obtained from both manipulation methods in one analysis model, the present experiment expected to find that whereas the size of third-person perceptions, the effect on self, and/or the effect on others may not significantly vary by the type of threat to cognitive ability, the size of third-person perceptions and its components may vary significantly by threat to sense of compassion. In addition, this experiment was expected to support the idea that by manipulating self-enhancement motivations, self-enhancement would emerge as a viable explanation for first-person perceptions.

The second goal of this experiment sought to determine how people evaluate positive media influences on themselves and on comparison other. In explaining first-person perceptions, Duck and Mullin (1995) suggested that there are two types of perspectives that define the self-enhancement explanation for first-person perceptions: the ego-enhancive perspective and the self-defensive perspective. The ego-enhancive perspective assumes that people tend to believe that positive media effects are stronger on the self than on others—a mechanism that has a

positive effect on self-view. In contrast, the ego-defensive perspective predicts that people do not tend to believe that positive media effects are stronger on the self than on others—here again a mechanism by which positive effects on self-view accrue. This experiment tested which perspective is more effective for explaining people’s perceptions of positive media influences.

Threat to Self-Worth and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages

As Meirick (2002) suggested, the self-threat paradigm provides a method to test the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions. Self-serving responses to a threat to self-worth have been found by many studies (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Brown & Smart, 1991; Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995; Steele & Liu, 1983). These studies found that threats to a specific aspect of self-worth amplify one’s self-enhancing needs, and such amplified self-enhancing needs lead people to construct perceptions of themselves that are self-serving.

Based on prior theorizing, the present experiment created a high versus a low self-enhancement motivation condition; it then analyzed how people evaluated relative media influences on themselves and others under these manipulated self-enhancement motivation conditions. Specifically, this experiment expected to find that when people have high self-enhancement motivations, difference between the perceived media influences on themselves and on others would be greater than when people have low self-enhancement motivations.

Although many studies have found robust third-person perceptions for socially undesirable media messages, it remains to be seen whether third-person perceptions are aroused principally through positive perceptions of the self or through negative perceptions of others. R. M. Perloff (1999) suggested that people may underestimate negative media influences and/or overestimate those influences on others when they evaluate undesirable messages. Even though

R. M. Perloff (1999) did not specify why people estimate media influences separately, McLeod et al. (2001) argued that both types of inaccurate estimations are likely to cause third-person perceptions. Furthermore, the recognition of underestimation and overestimation of media influence would be helpful in understanding how the components of third-person perceptions operate.

There have been strong research findings suggesting that threats to self-worth amplify self-enhancing needs and that such needs are likely to lead people to construct self-serving self-perceptions. The needs for perceiving oneself in a self-serving light would be realized in a third-person-perception context through underestimation of negative media effects on oneself, overestimation of negative media effects on others, or a combination of the two. That is, when a message is viewed as negative or harmful, it is functional for people to estimate that others are more vulnerable to the message's effect than they are—simply put, such attributions enhance beliefs of personal invulnerability and control (Gunther, 1991). Thus, people are expected to perceive others as particularly vulnerable to negative media influences, although they view themselves as less affected:

H1: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will show stronger third-person perceptions.

H1a: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that they are less influenced by negative media messages.

H1b: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that others are more influenced by negative media messages.

Threat to Self-Worth and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages

First-person perceptions that describe the tendency to perceive positive media messages as having more influences on oneself than on others have the same motivational goal as third-person perceptions. That is, whereas third-person perceptions serve people by allowing them to perceive themselves as better than others in terms of resistance to socially undesirable media influences, first-person perceptions lead people to view themselves as better than others in terms of their own stronger receptivity to desirable media effects. Regarding this tendency, communication scholars have proposed that both first- and third-person perceptions might result from self-enhancement motivations (Eveland & McLeod, 1999; Meirick, 2002). To be exact, because accepting desirable media influences and resisting undesirable influences are valued traits of a self-view, people are motivated to perceive themselves as less influenced by negative media messages and more influenced by positive messages, compared to other people—the stronger the self-enhancement motivation, the stronger this tendency is expected to become. However, although there is strong evidence to support third-person perceptions for negative media messages, research evidence for first-person perceptions is far from conclusive (R. M. Perloff, 2002).

According to Duck and Mullin (1995), such inconclusive research findings might have occurred because there were different motivational mechanisms behind perceptions of positive media influences. They suggested that people might perceive positive media influences ego-enhancively or ego-defensively in order to think of themselves as better than others (Duck & Mullin, 1995). The ego-enhancive mechanism predicts that people will overestimate positive media influences on themselves; the ego-defensive mechanism predicts that people will underestimate those influences. From this difference, whether people follow the ego-enhancive

or the ego-defensive mechanism to satisfy their self-enhancement motivations, they report different types of perception in regard to media influence on the self.

Again, studies have offered strong evidence that threats to self-worth strengthen self-enhancement motivation (Brown & Smart, 1991; Steele, 1988). And communication scholars have argued that differences between perceived media effects on the self and those on others become greater as one's self-enhancement motivations become stronger (R. M. Perloff, 2002). Based on the given reasoning, it was expected that, if the self-enhancive mechanism is better to define the self-enhancement explanation for first-person perceptions, then this experiment should find the following:

H2: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will show stronger first-person perceptions.

H2a: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that they are more influenced by positive media messages.

H2b: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that others are less influenced by positive media messages.

In contrast, the ego-defensive mechanism basically assumes that people do not want to perceive themselves as being influenced by any media messages regardless of any socially desirable content. Therefore, for people who have ego-defensive needs, resistance to positive media influences is self-enhancing. From this reasoning, it is anticipated that the underestimation of media influence on oneself is stronger when one's self-worth is threatened than when it is not. In accordance with this expectation, this experiment hypothesizes:

H3: Compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that they are less influenced by positive media messages.

The Role of Self-Esteem in the Self-Enhancement Explanation

Studies of self-esteem have found that people with high self-esteem are more likely to self-enhance than are people with low self-esteem in terms of responding to self-threats (Beauregard & Dunning, 1998; Brown & Smart, 1991). Specifically, Brown and Smart (1991) found that when self-worth was threatened, people with high self-esteem overstated the extent of their positive personal attributes, whereas people with low self-esteem tended to describe their personal attributes more negatively. Also, Brown (1986) and Campbell (1986) found that people with low self-esteem do not judge others in self-serving ways, at least not to the extent that people with high self-esteem do. In a third-person perceptions context, evaluating oneself as being less susceptible to negative media influences and others as being more so would be self-enhancing; this is because resistance to undesirable influences is generally a valued attribute in self-view. Therefore, to the extent that people view effects on self as weaker and perceive effects on others as greater, third-person perceptions under self-threat should increase, as their self-esteem increases.

H4: Among people who are threatened, differences between perceived negative media effects on self and those on others will increase as their self-esteem increases.

H4a: Among people who are threatened, perceived negative media effects on self will decrease as their self-esteem increases.

H4b: Among people who are threatened, perceived negative media effects on others will increase as their self-esteem increases.

In terms of evaluating desirable media influences on oneself and on other people, people with high-self esteem are also more likely to self-enhance than are people with low self-esteem under a self-threat condition. If this is so, the question must be this: To what extent will people

self-enhance when evaluating positive media effects? According to the ego-enhancive mechanism, it is assumed that perceiving greater positive media influences on oneself is self-enhancing. In contrast, the ego-defensive mechanism suggests that underestimating positive media influences on oneself is self-enhancing. Therefore, depending upon which mechanism is considered better to define perceptions of media influence, opposing hypotheses must be established and considered. For example, if the ego-enhancive mechanism is better, to the extent that people view effects on self as greater and perceive effects on others as weaker, first-person perceptions under self-threat should increase as their self-esteem increases.

H5: Among people who are threatened, differences between perceived positive media effects on self and those on others will increase as their self-esteem increases.

H5a: Among people who are threatened, perceived positive media effects on self will increase as their self-esteem increases.

H5b: Among people who are threatened, perceived positive media effects on others will decrease as their self-esteem increases.

If the ego-defensive mechanism is better to define how people evaluate media effects, people with higher self-esteem will perceive themselves as being less influenced by positive media messages than will those with lower self-esteem. This is because stronger resistance to media influences is more self-enhancing.

H6: Among people who are threatened, perceived positive media effects on self will decrease as their self-esteem increases.

In examining all hypotheses in this experiment, the possible moderating effect of threatened dimensions will be examined additionally. If threatening one's sense of compassion is more effective to explore third-person and first-person perceptions than is threatening one's

cognitive ability, this experiment will find significant interactions involving the threatened dimensions.

Method

Pre-Test: Developing the Instrument

This section describes the development of the instruments used to measure first- and third-person perceptions. One pilot study was conducted to look at the desirability of a wide array of different types of media messages (N = 22).

The pilot study included thirteen media messages, the effects of which were categorized as either desirable or undesirable. The seven undesirable messages consisted of three broadcasting messages (depictions of violence, racism, and sexism) and four advertising messages (commercials for cigarettes, online gambling, a diet pill, and a psychic hotline). The six desirable messages comprised three broadcasting messages (depictions of resistance to antisocial temptations, pro-social behaviors, and sympathy), and three public service announcement messages (depictions discouraging drunk driving, encouraging safe sex, and advocating seat belt use). Each topic was illustrated by a brief statement that provided participants with an explicit example of how people might be influenced by this type of media content. After reading the statement, participants were asked to estimate influences of those messages by answering two questions: “Do you think it would be good to be influenced by the content of this message?” and “Do you think it would be bad to be influenced by the content of this message?” Responses were made on an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (not good/bad at all) to 10 (very good/bad). The level of desirability was assessed by subtracting the response to the first question from the response to the second question. Thus, this level ranged from -10 (undesirable) to 10 (desirable).

Based on the strength of desirability and undesirability, three positive and three negative media messages were adopted in the final instrument. The set of positive messages were

encouragement to use seat belts ($M = 8.77, SD = 1.51$), advocacy of safe sex ($M = 7.82, SD = 2.04$), and depiction of pro-social behaviors ($M = 6.23, SD = 3.74$). The other set of negative messages included depiction of racism ($M = -6.14, SD = 4.63$), depiction of violence ($M = -6.09, SD = 3.38$), and the diet pill ad ($M = -5.86, SD = 3.52$). The first-person perceptions were assessed with three positive messages, and the third-person perceptions were measured with three negative messages. See Table 1 for the results regarding the desirability of each message.

Table 1.

Desirability of Each Media Message

Negative messages	Desirability		Positive messages	Desirability	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Racism	-6.14	4.63	Seat belt use	8.77	1.51
Violence	-6.09	3.38	Safe sex	7.82	2.04
Diet pill	-5.86	3.52	Pro-social behavior	6.23	3.74

$N = 22$

Note. The level of desirability ranged from -10 (undesirable) to 10 (desirable). The smaller the score, the higher the undesirability. The larger the score, the higher the desirability.

Main Experiment

Sample

Eighty-one undergraduate students were recruited at a large Northeastern university to participate in this study. Among them, 71.1 percent were female ($N = 59$), 26.5 percent were male ($N = 22$), and two participants did not indicate their gender. The average age of the sample was 20.61 years. In addition, 89.2 % percent were Caucasian ($N = 74$), and 65.4 percent were juniors ($N = 53$).

Design

This experiment employed a 2 (target: self, other) X 3 (message) X 2 (self-enhancement motivation: high, low) X 2 (threatened dimension: cognitive ability, sense of compassion) mixed analysis of variance with repeated measures on the first two factors to test Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. For examining Hypotheses 4, 5, and 6, a 2 (target) X 3 (message) X 2 (threatened dimension) X Self-Esteem mixed model was employed, with self-esteem employed as a continuous variable. The first two variables were repeated measure factors, and the third variable was a between subject factor.

Procedures and Materials

When participants arrived, the experimenter greeted them and explained what they could expect during the study. After the explanation, they were randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups: self-threat to cognitive ability, no self-threat to cognitive ability, self-threat to compassion, and no self-threat to compassion. After making the random assignments, the experimenter explained the consent form and distributed the questionnaires.

The first set of questions that all participants were asked to answer consisted of a 10-item self-esteem measure.² After answering questions for this measure, each group was directed to follow specific instructions. The no self-threat to cognitive ability and the self-threat to cognitive ability groups were asked to read the following statement: “The following set of questions is the Cognitive Flexibility Test. This test has been reported to be a very viable measure of one’s reasoning ability and to have positive relationships with college GPA and scores on standardized tests like the GRE and the LSAT.” After this description, the self-threat to cognitive ability group was asked to solve a difficult 10-item version of the Remote Associates Test, and the no

² This study used Rosenberg’s 10-item self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965).

self-threat to cognitive ability group took an easy 10-item version (see Appendix A for both versions of tests). Both groups were allowed five minutes to complete it. After taking the tests, all participants were given a feedback form that showed the correct answers, the number of correct answers they had, and their percentile rank among college students nationwide (see Appendix B for feedbacks). Participants who took the easy version were told that they had performed very well on the test and had placed in the 85th percentile of all students; those who took the difficult version were told that they had not performed very well on the test and had placed in the 35th percentile. Then, both groups of participants rated the influence of different types of media message on themselves and on others. Finally, participants were asked to answer several demographic questions and were then debriefed.³

To address circumstances that threaten one's sense of compassion, this study adopted the experimental procedures and materials designed by Aronson et al. (1995). In this procedure, those in the group designated as self-threat to compassion were asked to write a counter-attitudinal essay; participants in the no self-threat to compassion group were not asked to write an essay. This statement was read to the self-threat to compassion group: "The University's Committee for Plans and Resources is in the process of deciding whether or not to increase and expand services for people with physical disabilities, including elevators, parking spaces, wheelchair ramps, and physical therapy equipment and personnel. As this is an important decision, the committee is seeking input from undergraduates. The university committee has often found it useful to get students to write a brief essay either for or against a particular university action because such essays provide useful information about the issues involved in the decision." After this statement, the self-threat group received this further explanation: "Because

³ This experimental procedure for the groups of self-threat and no self-threat to cognitive ability is the same as that of Meirick's (2002) study.

most participants have volunteered to write essays in favor of increasing services for people with physical disabilities, there is a disproportionate number of essays on one side of the debate.

Therefore, I wonder if you wouldn't mind writing an essay against expanding these services."

The experimenter allowed the participants 15 minutes to complete the essay. After writing the essay, both groups were asked to evaluate the influence of different types of media messages on themselves and on others. Finally, participants were asked to answer several demographic questions before being debriefed.

Manipulation of Self-Enhancement Motivation

The self-enhancement motivation was manipulated with two different methods. One was to threaten participants' cognitive ability and another was to threaten their sense of compassion. The manipulation using the threat to cognitive ability was successful. Participants given the easy version scored higher ($M = 7.05$, $SE = .42$) than did those given the difficult version ($M = 1.19$, $SE = .34$), $t(40) = 10.86$, $p < .001$. Prior to receiving feedback, subjects were asked to estimate their performance and their own level of cognitive flexibility, that is, the ability purportedly being measured. Those given the easy version estimated their performance as higher ($M = 4.76$, $SE = .36$) than did those given the difficult version ($M = 2.19$, $SE = .38$), $t(40) = 4.91$, $p < .001$. Similarly, they evaluated their own cognitive ability as higher ($M = 5.10$, $SE = .19$) than those given the difficult version ($M = 4.14$, $SE = .42$), $t(40) = 2.08$, $p < .05$.

The current study employed another method for manipulating self-enhancement motivation as designed and tested by Aronson et al. (1995). In this design, the threat to sense of compassion group was asked to write a counter-attitudinal essay; participants in the no self-threat group were not asked to write an essay. Aronson et al. (1995) demonstrated that writing a counter-attitudinal essay successfully threaten participants' sense of compassion. The

participants in the self-threat-to-compassion group, who presumably felt that they had not acted compassionately toward people with physical disabilities, sought relatively fewer feedbacks (personality profiles) confirming their compassionate dispositions ($M = 0.07$) than did the participants in the no-self-threat-to-compassion group ($M = 14.0$), $t(54) = 5.80$, $p < .001$.⁴

Measures

Self-esteem. A 7-point version of the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale was used to measure global self-esteem. The 10 items are as follows: (1) “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”; (2) “At times, I think I am no good at all”; (3) “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”; (4) “I am able to do things as well as most other people”; (5) “I feel I do not have much to be proud of”; (6) “I certainly feel useless at times”; (7) “I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”; (8) “I wish I could have more respect for myself”; (9) “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure”; and (10) “I take a positive attitude toward myself.” Responses were made on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Among the ten items, five items (2, 5, 6, 8, and 9) were reverse-coded in the data analysis stage. The self-esteem scale in this experiment showed a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .79.

Third- and first-person perceptions. The measure of first- and third-person perceptions consisted of the descriptions of anti-social and pro-social media issues and questionnaires designed to detect the traditional and reversed third-person effect. After reading each description of the media content, participants were asked to estimate how much they believed the described

⁴ Before participants wrote a counter-attitudinal essay, they took a purported standard measure of personality. After taking this measure, the participants were told that, if interested, you would be able to read rather detailed personality profiles based on their response to the test. In this experiment, Aronson et al. (1995) assumed that if writing the counter-attitudinal essay threatened participants’ sense of compassion successfully, they would not be interested in reading the detailed personality profiles regarding their compassionate dispositions because they would expect to find negative information there.

media content would affect others, and then how much it would affect themselves. The question order of media influence on themselves and on others was counterbalanced to avoid any possible contrasting effect. Responses were made on an 11-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (no influence) to 10 (a great deal of influence). See Appendix C for all descriptions and questionnaires.

Three messages were chosen to represent desirable and undesirable messages. These messages were selected on the basis of desirability ratings. Reliability for the negative messages was equal to .64, and reliability for the positive messages was equal to .60. Because these reliability indicators suggested substantive variation in third- and first-person perceptions across messages, analyses treated messages as repeated measures factors to test for message effects on predicted relationships between self-enhancement and perceived media influence. For negative messages, three were chosen—the violence depiction, the racism depiction, and the diet pill ad. The three positive messages were the messages focusing on encouraging prosocial behavior, promoting safe-sex, and encouraging seat-belts use.

Result

Self-Enhancement Motivation and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages

Hypothesis 1 predicted that, compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will show stronger third-person perceptions for negative media messages. To explore this hypothesis, perceived negative effects on target (self, other), message (three negative messages), self-enhancement motivation (high, low) and dimension (cognitive ability, compassion) were tested in a 2 X 3 X 2 X 2 mixed analysis of variance with repeated measures on the first two factors. This model revealed a large main effect for target, $F(1, 79) = 354.88$, $\Lambda = .18$, $\eta_p^2 = .82$, $p < .001$; this indicated that perceived negative effects on others ($M = 5.77$, $SE = .18$) was significantly greater than those on the self ($M = 2.33$, $SE = .19$)—indicating strong third-person perceptions. In addition, a significant main effect for message was obtained, $F(2, 78) = 10.78$, $\Lambda = .78$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$, $p < .001$. The following bonferroni post hoc comparisons indicated that participants perceived the diet pill message ($M = 4.71$, $SE = .22$) as exerting the strongest influences, followed by the violence message ($M = 3.97$, $SE = .22$), and then the racism message, which exerted the weakest influence ($M = 3.48$, $SE = .22$) overall.

However, contrary to predictions, the Target X Enhancement interaction was not obtained, $F(1, 79) = 1.22$, ns—this indicated that the self–other differences in terms of perceived negative media effects did not vary by the self-enhancement motivation. Likewise, this result was consistently found across two threatened dimensions; the Target X Enhancement X Dimension interaction was not significant, $F(1, 79) = .40$, ns. Hypothesis 1 failed to find support.

To explore how self-enhancement motivations affect perceptions of negative effects on the self, Hypothesis 1a predicted that, compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that they are less influenced by negative media messages.

This hypothesis was tested in a 3 (effects on self for three negative messages) X 2 (self-enhancement) X 2 (dimension) mixed model with the first factor as a repeated measure. This analysis failed to reveal a significant main effect for enhancement, $F(1, 79) = .62$, ns. Also, the Enhancement X Dimension interaction was not significant, $F(1, 79) = 2.40$, ns. This experiment failed to support Hypothesis 1a.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that, compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that other people are more influenced by negative media messages. This hypothesis was tested by another mixed model with a focus on perceived negative effects on other instead of the perceived negative effects on self. This analysis also failed to found support for the main effect for enhancement, $F(1, 79) = .08$, ns, and the interaction between enhancement and dimension, $F(1, 79) = 1.00$, ns. Hypothesis 1b did not receive support.

Self-Enhancement Motivation and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages

Hypothesis 2 predicted that, compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will show stronger first-person perceptions for positive media messages. To explore this hypothesis, a 2 (target) X 3 (positive message) X 2 (self-enhancement motivation) X 2 (dimension) mixed analysis of variance was employed with repeated measures on the first two factors. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for target, $F(1, 79) = 18.14$, $\Lambda = .81$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$, $p < .001$, indicating that perceived positive influences on the self ($M = 6.27$, $SE = .22$) was significantly greater than those on others ($M = 5.69$, $SE = .20$)—thus significant first-person perceptions were observed. However, this main effect should be interpreted in light of the Target X Message interaction, $F(2, 78) = 10.40$, $\Lambda = .79$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$, $p < .001$. The bonferroni post hoc comparisons following the Target X Message interaction indicated the following: participants

perceived significantly stronger positive effects on themselves than on others for the message regarding safe-sex ($M = 6.64$, $SE = .28$ for self vs. $M = 5.66$, $SE = .26$ for others) and that focused on seat belt use ($M = 6.09$, $SE = .31$ for self vs. $M = 5.41$, $SE = .24$ for others), yet they viewed the message describing prosocial behavior as exerting virtually the same effects on themselves ($M = 6.07$, $SE = .22$) and on others ($M = 5.99$, $SE = .22$). However, the hypothesized Target X Enhancement interaction was not observed, $F(1, 79) = .05$, ns. This finding indicated that the self–other differences in terms of perceived positive media effects did not vary by participants’ level of self-enhancement motivation. This was the case not only in the cognitive ability dimension, but in the compassion dimension also; the Target X Enhancement X Dimension interaction was not significant, $F(1, 79) = 1.62$, ns. Hypothesis 2 failed to find support.

Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 3 tested which mechanism (the ego-enhancive or the ego-defensive mechanism) is better to explain perceptions of positive media effects on the self. According to the ego-enhancive mechanism, it was predicted that, compared to those who aren’t threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that they are more influenced by positive media messages (Hypothesis 2a). In contrast, the ego-defensive mechanism expected lesser positive effects on themselves among participants who were threatened than those who were not threatened (Hypothesis 3). A 3 (effects on self for three positive messages) X 2 (self-enhancement) X 2 (dimension) mixed model was employed to test this hypothesis with the first factor as a repeated measure.

Although this analysis revealed that participants who were threatened perceived themselves as being less influenced by positive media message ($M = 6.12$, $SE = .32$) than those who were unthreatened ($M = 6.41$, $SE = .32$), which was consistent with the ego-defensive

mechanism, those two means were not significantly different from each other; the main effect for self-enhancement was not significant, $F(1, 79) = .43$, ns. In examining each threatened dimension separately, the difference between the perceived effects on the self was larger in the compassion dimension (difference = .54; $M = 6.35$, $SE = .46$, for the threatened; $M = 6.89$, $SE = .45$ for the unthreatened) than the difference in the cognitive ability dimension (difference = .05; $M = 5.89$, $SE = .45$, for the threatened; $M = 5.94$, $SE = .45$ for the unthreatened). However, the perceived effects on the self between the threatened and the unthreatened conditions under the compassion dimension was not significant either, $F(1, 79) = .72$, ns. Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 3 failed to find support.

To test Hypothesis 2b that, compared to those who aren't threatened, people whose self-worth is threatened will believe that others are less influenced by positive media messages, another mixed model was employed with perceived positive effects on others instead of the perceived positive effects on self. This test did not reveal the main effect for enhancement, $F(1, 79) = .35$, ns, and the interaction between enhancement and dimension, $F(1, 79) = .07$, ns. Hypothesis 2b, therefore, did not find support.

Response to Threat and Self-Esteem for Negative Messages

Hypothesis 4 predicted that, among people who are threatened, differences between perceived negative media effects on self and those on others will increase as self-esteem increases. To test this hypothesis, a 2 (target) X 3 (negative message) X 2 (dimension) X Self-Esteem (continuous variable) mixed model was employed. The first two variables were repeated measure factors, and the third variable was a between subject factor. Contrary to expectations, this test did not reveal the Target X Self-Esteem interaction, $F(1, 37) = 2.66$, ns—this indicated that the self–other differences for negative messages did not vary by the self-esteem. Similarly,

this result was found consistently in two threatened dimensions; the Target X Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction was not significant, $F(1, 37) = 1.07$, ns. Thus, Hypothesis 4 did not find support.

To test Hypothesis 4a that, among people who are threatened, perceived negative media effects on self will decrease as self-esteem increases, a 3 (effects on self for three negative messages) X 2 (dimension) X Self-Esteem mixed models was employed. Consistent with expectation, the main effect for self-esteem was marginally significant, $F(1, 37) = 3.88$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, $p = .06$. The following correlation test revealed that perceived negative effects on self and self-esteem was negatively correlated ($r = -.29$, $p = .07$). Hypothesis 4a was supported. However, the Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction was not obtained, $F(1, 37) = .23$, ns.

Another mixed model with a focus on perceived negative effects on others instead of the perceived negative effects on self was examined to test Hypothesis 4b that, among people who are threatened, perceived negative media effects on others will increase as self-esteem increases. This model did not reveal the main effect for self-esteem, $F(1, 37) = .42$, ns, and the Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction, $F(1, 37) = 2.69$, ns, constituting a null finding for Hypothesis 4b.

Response to Threat and Self-Esteem for Positive Messages

Hypothesis 5 predicted that, among people who are threatened, differences between perceived positive media effects on self and those on others will increase as their self-esteem increases. This hypothesis was tested in a 2 (target) X 3 (positive messages) X 2 (dimension) X Self-Esteem (continuous variable) mixed model of analysis of variance. This analysis did not reveal the predicted Target X Self-Esteem interaction, $F(1, 37) = .81$, ns. Hypothesis 5 failed to find support.

However, the Target X Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction was obtained in this analysis, $F(1, 37) = 4.45$, $\Lambda = .89$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, $p < .05$. This finding indicated that the self–other difference for positive media messages was varied by participants’ level of self-esteem and by the dimension under threat. To illustrate this interaction, correlations were computed between self-esteem and perceived effects on self or those on others in the cognitive ability dimension and the compassion dimension (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Correlations Between Self-Esteem and Perceived Positive Effects on Self, Those on Others, and Self-Other Differences by Threatened Dimension

	Effects on self	Effects on other	Self-Other differences
Compassion	-.54*	-.40 [^]	-.35
Cognitive ability	.35	.23	.29

Note. * $p < .05$ [^] $p < .10$

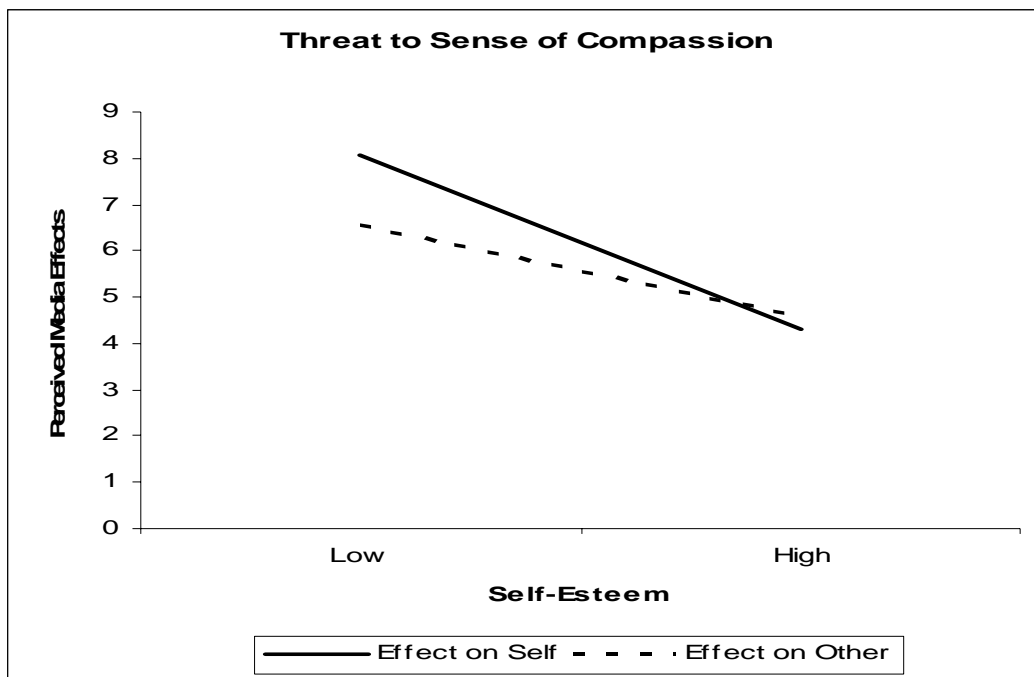


Figure 1. Regression slopes of self-esteem on positive media effects on the self and those on others under threats to sense of compassion

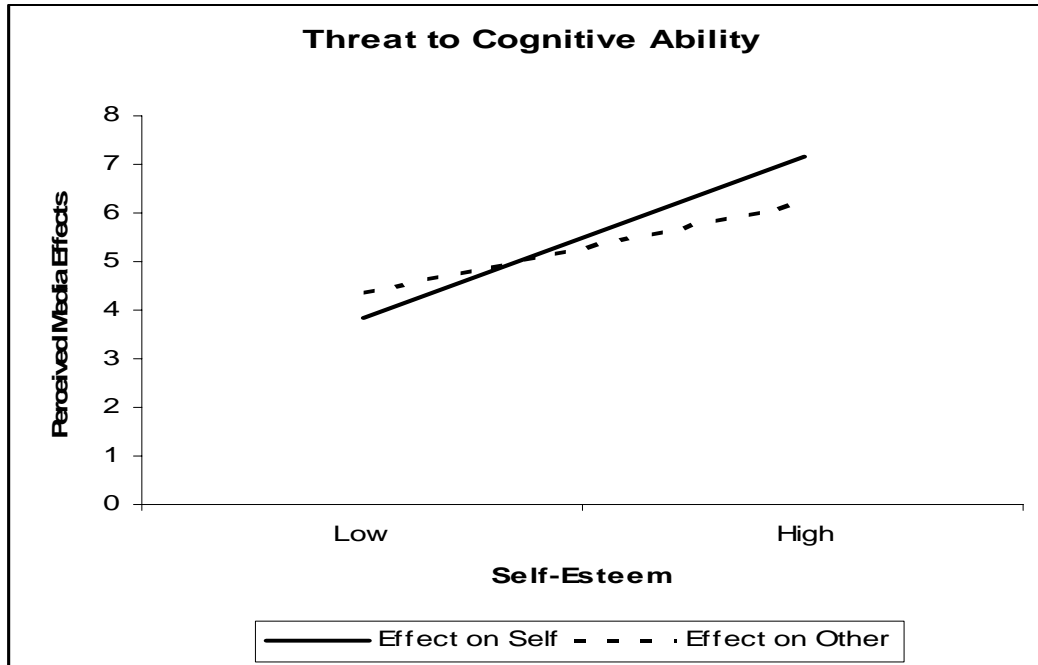


Figure 2. Regression slopes of self-esteem on positive media effects on the self and those on others under threats to cognitive ability

As Figure 1 shows, among participants who received threats to their sense of compassion, self–other differences and self-esteem were negatively correlated, although this correlation was not significant ($r = -.35$, ns). In this negative relationship, as self-esteem increased, the effects on self decreased more rapidly ($r = -.54$, $p = .01$) than did the effects on others ($r = -.40$, $p = .08$). In contrast, self-esteem was positively (though not significantly) correlated with the self–other differences ($r = .29$, ns), the effects on self ($r = .35$, ns) and the effects on others ($r = .23$, ns) for participants whose cognitive ability was threatened (see Figure 2). Given these observations, the Target X Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction may have been obtained because the correlations between the self-other differences and self-esteem operated in the opposite direction between the threatened dimensions: negative correlations in the compassion dimension and positive correlations in the cognitive ability dimension.

Based on the ego-enhancive mechanism, Hypothesis 5a predicted a positive relationship between perceived positive effects on the self and self-esteem among people who are threatened. In contrast, based on the ego-defensive mechanism, Hypothesis 6 predicted a negative relationship among people threatened. With a focus on the perceived positive media effects on the self, a 3 (effects on self for three positive messages) X 2 (dimension) X Self-Esteem (continuous variable) mixed model tested those opposing hypotheses. This test did not reveal the main effect for self-esteem, $F(1, 37) = 1.32$, ns. However, a significant Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction was obtained, $F(1, 37) = 9.19$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, $p < .01$. As Table 2 shows, this interaction was obtained because the correlation between the effects on self and self-esteem was not significant for the cognitive ability dimension ($r = .35$, ns), but was significant for the compassion dimension ($r = -.54$, $p = .01$). Hypothesis 6 was supported only for the participants who received threats to their sense of compassion.

Hypothesis 5b that predicted a negative relationship between perceived positive media effects on others and self-esteem among people who are threatened was tested in another mixed model which had a focus on the positive effects on others instead of the positive effects on self. There was no significant main effect for self-esteem, $F(1, 37) = .44$, ns. However, there was a marginally significant Self-Esteem X Dimension interaction observed, $F(1, 37) = 3.78$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, $p = .06$. As Table 2 indicates, self-esteem was significantly negatively correlated with the positive effects on others only in the compassion dimension ($r = -.40$, $p < .08$). Hypothesis 5b found a support only for the participants who received threats to their sense of compassion.

Discussion

This experiment tested the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions. Using the two methods for manipulating participants' self-enhancement motivations, it was explored how their level of self-enhancement motivations affects perceived media effects on themselves and those on comparison other, and differences between those two perceived effects. In addition, the effect of self-esteem on perceived media effects was examined with particular emphasis on participants with high self-enhancement motivation resulting from a threat to their self-worth. Finally, the present experiment also explored participants' perceptions of positive messages by comparing the ego-enhancive mechanism of self-enhancement with the ego-defensive mechanism—this idea, though raised by a few communication researchers, has yet to be examined empirically.

The present experiment found that the extent of third-person perceptions, perceived effects on the self, and those on others, were not affected by self-enhancement motivations in regard to socially undesirable messages. Although it was expected that increased needs for self-enhancement that resulted from the threat would increase self–other differences as well as increase perceived effects on others, and decrease perceived effects on the self, it was not the case in this experiment. One possible way of accounting for these null findings is a ceiling effect. In explaining his own null findings for third-person perceptions, Meirick (2002) argued that “there may be a ceiling on people’s vigilance against influences from undesirable messages, so that the threat manipulation simply couldn’t move them much further in that direction” (pp.70-71). In other words, if one’s willingness to perceive oneself as resistant is already high, there may be little if any room for self-enhancement by considering oneself as more resistant to harmful media influences whether or not threat is present. If this is so, a ceiling would prevent

participants from reporting increased resistance to harmful media effects on themselves. This might have led to the null finding for third-person perceptions. Furthermore, harmful media messages that were tested in this experiment were selected for their high level of undesirability. So, participants would be likely to perceive being influenced by them as very harmful whether or not their self-worth was under threat. This might reinforce a ceiling effect.

Although the increased needs for self-enhancement did not affect third-person perceptions and its components as described above, perceived negative influences on the self were affected by self-esteem under threat to self-worth. As expected in Hypothesis 4a, it was found that participants' self-esteem was negatively correlated with the perceived negative effects on themselves when there was a threat to self-worth. This finding is consistent with self-enhancement because perceiving lesser negative effects on the self would make people feel good about themselves and this perception is likely to be more apparent as their self-esteem increases. However, perceived negative effects on others and third-person perceptions among participants who were threatened did not vary by level of self-esteem in this study.

The findings for first-person perceptions and its components are surprising. This experiment, contrary to expectations, did not find that participants under threat, rather than those not under threat, perceived greater positive effects on the self, smaller positive effects on others, and stronger first-person perceptions for socially desirable messages. However, when self-esteem was considered in examining first-person perceptions and its components, significant differences did become evident, particularly in the compassion dimension. That is, although self-other differences did not significantly vary by participants' self-esteem, their self-esteem was negatively correlated with not only perceived beneficial effects on comparison other but also those on the self.

The perception that others are less receptive to beneficial influences would be consistent with self-enhancement. Moreover, it also makes sense that as people have higher levels of self-esteem, they would be more likely to manifest this. However, the finding that as self-esteem increased, participants perceived themselves as less receptive to beneficial media effects may not make immediate sense. Consideration of further factors may clarify this result. Particularly for positive messages, people can enhance their self-view through judging discrepant perceptions of media influences on themselves and on others through an ego-enhancive or ego-defensive mechanism (Eveland & McLeod, 1999). These two mechanisms are conceptually different in their assumptions of how people estimate media influences on the self (Duck & Mullin, 1995). The ego-defensive mechanism of self-enhancement assumes that people can enhance their self-view by showing their superiority in resisting media influences because maintaining their control over their attitude and behavior is a valued self-definition trait. In contrast, the ego-enhancive mechanism assumes that being receptive to beneficial media influences is self-enhancing. In this case, the ego-defensive mechanism turned out to be a more convincing explanation of how people perceive beneficial media effects on themselves to enhance their self-view.

It was expected at the beginning of this experiment that manipulating self-enhancement motivation through a threat to sense of compassion might make people perceive lesser negative media effects on themselves and, consequently, show stronger third-person perception than might manipulating it through a threat to cognitive ability. This expectation was correct to a certain extent. It was argued that Meirick (2002) might not have found a significant difference between the threat and the no threat conditions in terms of the extent of perceived effects on the self and corresponding third-person perceptions for harmful media messages because a threat to cognitive ability might have prevented his participants from affirming their superiority in terms

of ability to discern negativity in media messages over comparison targets. However, participants in this experiment were expected to respond to a threat to their sense of compassion effectively by thinking that they are more resistant to harmful media influences than are comparison others because a threatened sense of compassion is not related to the ability to discern harmfulness in messages. Indeed, participants who received a threat to their compassion considered themselves more resistant to harmful media influences ($M = 2.23, SE = .31$) than did participants threatened in regard to their cognitive ability ($M = 2.73, SE = .40$). However, these two means of perceived negative effects on the self did not show a significant difference, $F(1, 78) = .75, ns$; this increased resistance among participants who received a threat to their sense of compassion did not significantly increase the corresponding extent of third-person perceptions.

Experiment 2

Experiment 2 basically had the same purpose as Experiment 1: to test the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions. However, this experiment was characterized by a different approach than that taken in the previous experiment. That is, instead of manipulating high or low self-enhancing needs directly based on threat to self-worth frameworks, this experiment compared self-enhancement motivations with self-assessment motivations in order to examine how the level of self-enhancing needs affect perceptions of media influences.

As described earlier in this study, the self-enhancement motivation is thought to increase differences between perceived media effects on the self and those on others. The self-assessment motivation, on the other hand, is expected to decrease those differences. The literature indicates that people with self-assessment motivations are desired to reduce uncertainty about their abilities and personality characteristics (Trope, 1980). To reduce such uncertainty, people pursue accurate evaluations of the self by engaging in lateral social comparisons (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Sedikides, 1999). Given this reasoning, it is expected that, when people are more motivated to pursue accurate evaluations and to engage in lateral social comparisons, they are less prone to perceiving themselves in a self-enhancing light. If this is the case, the self-assessment motivation would lead people to show non-significant or at least less pronounced third- and first-person perceptions. Based on this prediction, the second experiment explored how people evaluate media influences with primed self-enhancement motivations or primed self-assessment motivations.

I believe this is the first trial to examine the effect of needs for self-enhancement on people's perceptions of media influences by comparing self-enhancement motivations with self-

assessment motivations. Moreover, this method of examination may have at least one benefit over the approach used in the first experiment. According to Riketta and Dauenheimer (2003), bogus feedback as used in the first experiment is likely to affect other variables in addition to self-esteem and thus lead to confounds. Above all, feedback may affect mood. In fact, bogus feedback is also a common procedure to manipulate mood (e.g., Barone, Miniard, & Romeo, 2000). Thus, many of the results presented in false-feedback studies may be interpreted in terms of mood (rather than self-esteem) effects. So, instead of providing direct false feedback on participants' so-called poor performances, indirectly priming self-motivation may prove more effective in terms of avoiding such a confound.

The Effects of Self-Motivations on Perceptions of Negative Media Messages

The literature suggests that each self-motivation results in a unique motivational consequence. For example, self-enhancement motivations function as a motivational impetus for downward social comparisons, whereas self-assessment motivations function as the impetus for lateral social comparisons (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Based on the types of social comparison (e.g., downward or lateral) that people employ in estimating media influences, the perceived differences between media influences on the self and those on others are likely to increase or decrease. That is, downward social comparisons as a result of self-enhancement motivations may increase the extent of perceived differences, whereas lateral social comparisons proceeding from self-assessment motivations may decrease the extent of perceived differences.

According to the self-enhancement motivation perspective, individuals want to enhance their positive self-conceptions or protect the self from negative information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Sedikides, 1993). Downward social comparisons are thought to be self-enhancing because they show that one is better than others in the dimensions under evaluation (Wills, 1991). Such

downward comparisons are expected to be rewarding; consequently, they help people to satisfy their self-enhancement motivations (Taylor, Wayment, & Carrillo, 1996).

Downward comparisons are defined as people comparing themselves with a target person whose “attributes, outcomes, or emotional states are worse than one’s own; that is the comparison target is more disadvantaged, more inadequate, or more distressed than oneself” (Taylor, Wayment, & Carrillo, 1996, p. 5). Furthermore, L. S. Perloff and Fetzer (1986) argued that when “an average person” is used as a target other—a technique employed by the majority of third-person effect studies—participants tend to evaluate themselves as more immune by comparison. In this comparison, “an average person may be seen as someone who is, almost by comparison, less advantaged, less intelligent, and generally worse off than the self” (p. 503). Indeed, self-enhancement motivations lead people to formulate downward social comparisons (Wills, 1991).

If this is the case, a salient self-enhancement motivation is likely to induce greater differences between perceptions of media influences on the self and those on others. To fulfill self-enhancement motivations, people may evaluate others as worse than they are by perceiving others to be more affected and/or perceiving the self to be less affected by negative media influences.

In contrast, self-assessment motivations are expected to decrease the differences between perceptions of negative influence on the self and those on others. People with self-assessment motivations have a tendency to evaluate themselves in comparison to similar others in order to obtain an accurate self-appraisal. When an accurate sense of self is desired, preferences for objective information and social comparisons with similar others should be observed (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995). Basically, lateral comparisons are evaluations of the self with target

people whose personal qualities, attributes, or outcomes are roughly the same as one's own. Such comparisons have been considered as the most common and the most useful for self-evaluation because similar others are construed as being most informative for the self-evaluation processes (Taylor, Wayment, & Carrillo, 1996).

Based on the prediction that the self-enhancement motivation may increase self-other differences in terms of perceived negative media influences and that the self-assessment motivation may decrease the self-other differences, this experiment hypothesized:

H1: People with self-enhancement motivations will show stronger third-person perceptions than will people with self-assessment motivations.

The self-enhancement motivation is expected to explain a tendency to underestimate negative effects on the self and a tendency to overestimate negative effect on others because making positive judgments about oneself and negative judgments regarding others serves to enhance one's self-view. In contrast, the self-assessment motivation does not offer a way to explain these tendencies. Self-assessment motivations lead people to pursue accurate pictures of the self, while self-enhancement motivations lead to selective processing of self-serving information; people with self-enhancement motivations attempt to focus on information that has favorable implications and avoid information that has unfavorable implications for themselves (Sedikides, 1993). Such differences in terms of information-pursuing tendencies may lead to different patterns of estimations of media influences on the self and on comparison others. Regarding negative media influences on the self, people with self-assessment motivations are likely to evaluate media influences in an accurate manner by using lateral comparisons, whereas people who have self-enhancement motivations tend to judge the same influences in a biased manner through downward comparisons. Thus, people with high self-assessment needs rather

than people with high self-enhancement needs are more likely to accept negative media influences on the self. In the case of negative media influences on others, the self-assessment motivation may not contribute to people perceiving others as significantly more influenced than the self, whereas the self-enhancement motivation may do so. Based on such expectations, this experiment hypothesizes:

H1a: Perceived negative influences of media messages on self will be larger for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations.

H1b: Perceived negative influences of media messages on others will be smaller for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations.

The Effects of Self-Motivations on Perceptions of Positive Media Messages

The self-assessment motivation is thought to lead people to engage in comparisons with similar others. Therefore, people with self-assessment motivations may not evaluate themselves more favorably than they evaluate others. On this basis, it is predicted that they make unbiased estimations of positive media influences on themselves and those on others. Such predictions clearly differ from those made from the ego-enhancive mechanism or the ego-defensive mechanism of self-enhancement explanation in regard to estimates of positive media influences on the self and those on comparison other.

In comparison to the ego-enhancive mechanism, self-assessment motivations would lead a perceiver to evaluate positive media influences on the self as weaker and/or those on others as stronger than the ego-enhancive perspective would. In other words, to achieve its motivational goal, the ego-enhancive mechanism predicts that people overestimate positive media influences on the self and underestimate the same influences on others. On the other hand, the self-

assessment motivation predicts that people estimate positive media influences accurately without overestimation or underestimation. To test these predictions, this experiment hypothesizes:

H2: People with self-enhancement motivations will show stronger first-person perceptions than will people with self-assessment motivations.

H2a: Perceived positive influences of media messages on self will be smaller for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations.

H2b: Perceived positive influences of media messages on others will be larger for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations.

The ego-defensive mechanism predicts that people underestimate positive media influences on the self; the ego-enhancive mechanism predicts that people overestimate the same influences; the self-assessment motivation predicts that people rather accurately estimate the influences. Based on these predictions, if the ego-defensive mechanism is more capable to explain people's perceptions of the extent to which positive media messages influence the self, the following hypothesis will be supported.

H3: Perceived positive influences of media messages on self will be larger for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations.

Method

Sample

Forty-three undergraduate students were recruited at a large Northeastern university to participate in this study. Among them, 72.1 percent were female ($N = 31$) and 27.9 percent were male ($N = 12$). About 88 percent were Caucasian ($N = 38$), 34.9 percent were seniors ($N = 15$), and 58.1 percent were juniors ($N = 25$). The average age was 21 years.

Design

This experiment employed a 2 (target: self, other) X 3 (message) X 2 (motivation: primed self-enhancement or self-assessment) mixed analysis of variance with repeated measures on the first two factors. The last variable was a between subject factor.

Procedures and Materials

When participants arrived at the experiment, an experimenter greeted them and randomly assigned them to either the self-enhancement group or the self-assessment group. By following specific instructions, each group was induced to favor one of the two self-motivations. In the past, many psychology scholars have attempted to test two or more self-motivations against each other (Brown, 1990; Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Trope, 1986). For example, Brown (1990) and Trope (1986) tested whether people are motivated by self-enhancement or self-assessment motivations. Such an approach assumes that people may attempt to satisfy self-assessment motivations in one situation, but they may seek to self-enhance in another situation. However, because people may seek to fulfill multiple motivations in a given circumstance (Taylor, Neter, & Wayment, 1995), this paper manipulated the motivation that is more salient than others that may be also be present. Based on which self-motivation was made more salient, the participants of this study were expected to report different patterns of perception of media influences.

To address circumstances that raise one's awareness of self-evaluation needs and self-motivations, this paper adopted the descriptions of circumstances used by Taylor et al. (1995)—descriptions developed to encourage participants to evaluate their personal qualities. Based on these descriptions, the experimenter asked participants to focus on subjective experiences that had elicited each self-motivation (e.g., the particular motive assigned to a given group) and to report specific examples of those experiences that reflect the subjective state to be induced. As a general introduction for implicitly inducing the required motivations, the participants were asked to read these short lines: "Often we find ourselves evaluating our personal qualities, our work, our social relationships, or other aspects of ourselves. Sometimes we may do it because we want an accurate appraisal of where we stand, and other times we just want to feel good about ourselves." After reading this general introduction, the participants were asked to follow one of two introductions designed to make salient a given motivation.

To make self-enhancement motivations salient, participants read the following statement: "Sometimes we just want to feel good about ourselves. At certain moments, it's important to think favorably about some aspects of ourselves." After this lead-in, participants were asked to provide specific examples of when they wanted to feel good about themselves and to detail a particular situation that had led them to want to experience this feeling.

The same procedure was employed to elicit self-assessment motivations, but with different lead-ins. Participants read the following statement: "Sometimes we are concerned with evaluating ourselves accurately. That is, we want a sense of how we really stand on some particular aspects or parts of our lives."

After participants provided their specific personal examples, they were asked to estimate the extent to which media messages influence the self and the extent to which media messages

influence comparison others. After finishing all procedures, participants were debriefed and dismissed.

Manipulation of Self-Enhancement Motivation

The manipulation of priming self-enhancement motivations or self-assessment motivations was tested before the main experiment was conducted. As mentioned earlier, people are likely to have multiple self-motivations at the same time. So, in this experiment, a specific motivation was manipulated to be more salient than other motivations that may also be present.

To test this manipulation, this experiment estimated the difference in self-enhancement motivations between participants with primed salient self-enhancement motivations and those with salient self-assessment motivations. Because primed self-assessment motivations should decrease one's self-enhancing needs, and primed self-enhancement motivations should reinforce or increase such needs, if the manipulation was successful, there should be a significant difference in terms of the extent of self-enhancement motivation between the two groups of participants.

As self-enhancing tendencies are characterized by cognitive maneuvers that allow individuals to persuade themselves that they more closely approximate their cultural ideals than in fact they do (Greenwald, 1980), a measure of the tendency to overestimate one's own uniqueness (false-uniqueness) can be used as a proxy measure of self-enhancement (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The current experiment approached false-uniqueness using an 11-item measure, consisting of five traits valued by the independent construal of self (i.e., attractive, interesting, independent, confident, and intelligent); five traits valued by the interdependent construal of self (i.e., cooperative, loyal, considerate, hard-working, and dependable) (Markus & Kitayama, 1991); and one exploratory item (i.e., academic performance). These traits were compiled to

form a uniqueness scale that participants were asked to use to estimate the percentage of the population of the same age and sex that is better than they are in regard to the traits presented (Taylor & Brown, 1988). The current uniqueness scale employs a 50% benchmark (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Self-enhancement bias would be indicated if the respondent's estimate of how many people exceed him/her is lower than 50%. These criteria are based on the assumption that on average approximately 50% of the population is likely to be better than the research participants in regard to any given trait. The manipulation was successful. Participants with the primed self-enhancement motivation showed a higher level of false-uniqueness ($M = 21.98, SE = 2.17$) than did those with the primed self-assessment motivation ($M = 30.77, SE = 3.22$), $t(32) = 2.96, p < .05$. In other words, the participants with primed self-enhancement motivation evaluated smaller percentages of the population as better than themselves than did the participants with primed self-assessment motivation.

Measures

Third- and first-person perceptions. These measures were the same as those in Experiment 1.

Result

Self-Motivations and Perceptions of Negative Media Messages

Hypothesis 1 predicted that people with self-enhancement motivations will show stronger third-person perceptions than will people with self-assessment motivations. To explore this hypothesis, perceived negative media effects on target (self, other), message (three negative messages) and motivation (self-enhancement motivation, self-assessment motivation) were tested in a 2 X 3 X 2 mixed model with repeated measures on the first two factors. The last variable was a between subject factor. This model revealed a large main effect for target, $F(1, 41) = 126.42, \Lambda = .25, \eta_p^2 = .76, p < .001$; this indicated that perceived negative effects on others ($M = 6.18, SE = .22$) were significantly greater than those on self ($M = 2.78, SE = .29$)—that is, strong third-person perceptions. However, contrary to expectations, the hypothesized Target X Motivation interaction was not significant, $F(1, 41) = .84, ns$, which constituted a null finding for Hypothesis 1.

To explore Hypothesis 1a that perceived negative influences of media messages on self will be larger for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations, a 3 (effects on self for three negative messages) X 2 (motivation) mixed model with the first factor as a repeated measure was employed. The predicted main effect for motivation was not significant, $F(1, 41) = .01, ns$. Hypothesis 1a failed to find support.

Another mixed model with perceived negative effects on others instead of the perceived negative effects on self did not reveal the main effect for enhancement either, $F(1, 41) = 1.28, ns$. Hypothesis 1b, which predicted that perceived negative influences of media messages on others will be smaller for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations, also failed to find support.

Self-Motivations and Perceptions of Positive Media Messages

For positive media messages, Hypothesis 2 predicted that people with self-enhancement motivations will show stronger first-person perceptions than will people with self-assessment motivations. To test this hypothesis, a 2 (target) X 3 (three positive messages) X 2 (motivation) mixed model was employed. This analysis did not reveal any significant main effects or interactions. Hypothesis 2 failed to find support.

Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 3 tested people's perceptions of positive media effects on themselves. Based on the ego-enhancive mechanism, Hypothesis 2a predicted that perceived positive influences of media messages on the self will be smaller for people with self-assessment motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations. In contrast, based on the ego-defensive mechanism, H3 predicted larger positive effects on themselves for people with the self-assessment motivations than for those with self-enhancement motivations.

A 3 (effects on self for three positive messages) X 2 (motivation) mixed model with a repeated measure on the first factor was employed to examine those opposing hypotheses. This analysis did not reveal the expected main effect for motivation, $F(1, 41) = .06$, ns. Although participants with self-enhancement motivations considered themselves as being less influenced by positive messages ($M = 6.00$, $SE = .47$) than did those with self-assessment motivations ($M = 6.17$, $SE = .46$), as the ego-defensive mechanism expected, the differences of the perceived effects on self between the two groups of participants were virtually same. Hypothesis 2a and Hypothesis 3 were not supported.

Another mixed model focused on perceived positive effects on others instead of the perceived positive effects on the self was employed to test Hypothesis 2b that perceived positive influences of media messages on others will be larger for people with self-assessment

motivations than for people with self-enhancement motivations. This test did not reveal the main effect for motivation either, $F(1, 41) = .07$, ns, which constituted a null finding for Hypothesis 2b.

Discussion

This experiment explored the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions and the issue of ego-enhancive versus ego-defensive mechanisms in explaining first-person perceptions phenomena. Two experimental groups were created through priming self-enhancement or self-assessment motivations; these two groups were different in terms of their levels of self-enhancement motivation. However, the two groups of participants did not show any significant differences that were expected from hypotheses in this experiment.

As found in Experiment 1, self-enhancement motivation did not affect perceived media effects on the self or those on comparison others; nor did it affect the differences between those two perceived effects. These results were consistently observed in examining perceptions of socially undesirable and desirable media message effects. What could account for these null findings? One possibility to explain these null findings might be found in the strength of manipulation of self-enhancement motivation in this experiment. The manipulation check indicated that, in terms of the extent of self-enhancement motivation, there were not big differences between the group of participants with primed self-enhancement motivations and the group of those with primed self-assessment motivations. Although the manipulation was proved to be successful, relatively small differences in self-enhancement motivations between the two groups of participants might not be strong enough to make significant differences in terms of perceptions of negative and positive media influences.

Taken together, the idea of a ceiling effect and higher level of message undesirability may also explain the null findings for negative messages as suggested in Discussion of Experiment 1. In other words, if people have a ceiling on vigilance against harmful media influences, they would be unable to self enhance through expressing stronger resistance to

harmful media influences on themselves. In addition, because negative messages tested in this experiment were obviously pernicious in their possible influence, perceived resistance to those messages might already be very high. So, there would be no self-enhancement to be derived from showing more resistance. The same logic is also plausible as a way to account for null findings for positive media messages. That is, if there is an upper limit on one's receptiveness to socially desirable media influences, increased self-enhancement motivation by threat could not lead to showing stronger first-person perceptions. A person's need for control might contribute to such a ceiling effect in this case. That is, because people do not want to lose control over their own attitudes, they would set an upper limit in terms of their own receptiveness to media influences. If such is the case, a threat manipulation simply could not push participants over that preset limit.

General Discussion

Summary of Findings

The present study explored the self-enhancement explanation for third- and first-person perceptions that, though often cited as the most prevailing explanation for third-person perceptions (R. M. Perloff, 2002), has yet to be clearly supported empirically. Two experiments were conducted to test the idea that third- and first-person perceptions are a function of self-enhancement motivations. In these experiments, the self-enhancement motivation was experimentally manipulated to examine its effect on people's perceptions of media influences on themselves and those on others.

Three main research questions were examined: (1) the effect of self-enhancement motivation on the extent of perceived media influences on the self, the effect of self-enhancement motivation on the extent of perceived media influences on comparison others, and the corresponding differences between the two; (2) the role of self-esteem in evaluating media influences, particularly under the self-threat condition; and (3) the question of whether people estimate beneficial media influences in ways that are consistent with the ego-enhancive mechanism or the ego-defensive mechanism.

Perceptions of media influences under threat to self-worth. Based on the work of Steele (1988) and other researchers who have employed his methodology (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Brown & Smart, 1991; Meirick, 2002), the first experiment expected to find the following: if third- and first-person perceptions are a function of the self-enhancement motivation, changing needs for self-enhancement caused by a threat to self-worth would lead to changes in the extent of those perceptions and their components (perceptions of media influences on the self and on others). However, these predictions were not supported. Threat to self-worth had no significant

effects on third- and first-person perceptions; nor did threat to self-worth have an effect on their components. In other words, the extent to which people consider themselves and comparison others as being influenced by negative or positive media messages was not significantly changed by the extent of the needs to fulfill the self-enhancement motivations. These results were consistently observed whether the threat was to cognitive ability or to sense of compassion.

One possible explanation for these null findings is a ceiling effect, as suggested in the discussions for both experiments. That is, if people have a ceiling on their resistance to undesirable media influences, needs for self-enhancement in response to threat could not move them significantly further in that direction because a limit might already have been reached. In addition, very high undesirability of media messages which tested in this study may reinforce this ceiling effect. So, no self-enhancement could be derived from showing more resistance. The same logic could be applied to explain the null findings for positive media influences. That is, if there is an upper limit on one's receptiveness to socially desirable media influences, increased needs for self-enhancement in response to a threat could not engender stronger first-person perceptions. To confirm this logic, the mean perceived effects on the self computed in two experiments were scrutinized.

As Table 3 shows, the mean values of perceived negative effects on the self are similar across experimental conditions. It is also the case for the mean values of positive effects on the self. When the means and standard errors were considered together, the mean values were not different from each other in terms of the negative effects on the self or the positive effects on the self. Therefore, these values could be interpreted thus: the participants may have a ceiling on their resistance to harmful media influences or receptiveness to beneficial media influences: they

could not think of themselves as being more resistant or receptive to harmful or beneficial influences over that limit.

Table 3.

Mean Perceived Effects on Self

Experimental condition	Experiment 1		Experiment 2	
	Threat	No threat	Enhancement	Assessment
Positive effects on self	$M = 6.12$	$M = 6.42$	$M = 6.00$	$M = 6.17$
	$SE = .32$	$SE = .33$	$SE = .47$	$SE = .46$
Negative effects on self	$M = 2.48$	$M = 2.18$	$M = 2.81$	$M = 2.74$
	$SE = .27$	$SE = .27$	$SE = .41$	$SE = .40$

Note. In the case of positive effects on self, the higher the mean, the higher the receptiveness to beneficial media effects. In the case of negative effects on self, the smaller the mean, the higher the resistance to harmful media effects.

Another possible explanation for these null findings is that threat to self-worth might put participants in negative affects. People in negative affects do not tend to see themselves in a self-serving light (Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). Tabachnik et al. (1993) suggested that people with negative affects do not perceive themselves favorably than the average person. In particular, they found that people who are depressed are less likely to show a tendency to evaluate themselves less negatively on negative characteristics relative to the average person and a tendency to evaluate themselves more positively on positive characteristics.

In Experiment 1, participants were threatened in order to increase their needs for self-enhancement by using two methods. First method was to threaten their cognitive ability by asking them to solve 10 difficult questions and giving them false feedback in regard to their poor performance. Second method threatened their sense of compassion by asking them to write the

counter-attitude essay which was against fund-raising for people with physical disabilities. These two methods might induce negative affects among the participants. So, if the both methods put the participants in negative affects, they would not perceive themselves favorably than comparison others. In other words, they might not express their superiority over comparison others in terms of receptiveness to beneficial media influences and resistance to harmful media influences.

Self-motivations and perceptions of media influences. In the second experiment, the need for self-enhancement was manipulated by priming self-enhancement motivations and self-assessment motivations. Consistent with the expectations of the first experiment, it was expected that a change in self-enhancement needs would change the extent of perceived media effects on the self and those on comparison others, as well as corresponding self–other differences in terms of perceived media effects. However, as found in the first experiment, the extent of the need for self-enhancement did not affect perceptions of media influences for either negative or positive media messages. Again, an explanation focused on a possible ceiling effect may account for these results. Also the relatively weak manipulation of the need for self-enhancement may explain these results as suggested in the Discussion of Experiment 2.

The explanation focused on negative affect as suggested in the preceding section may also be viable for accounting for the null findings. In other words, if negative affects were induced among the participants in the primed self-enhancement motivation condition, they might not consider themselves as better than others in terms of resisting negative media influences and receiving positive media influences. It was suspected that negative affects might have been induced during the participants described when they wanted to behave in a way that is consistent with self-enhancement. According to their descriptions, it was found that they were motivated to

enhance positive self-views when they experienced negative events, such as failure at important tasks and the breakup of a romantic relationship. For example, among the 21 participants, seven described failing an exam, three mentioned loss of a romantic relationship, and one referred to his team's loss of a competition. They indicated that they had experienced a motivation to enhance their positive self-views. Here are some statements that the participants made in this regard:

“When I did poorly on a test, I wanted to make myself feel better.”

“When I failed my exam and didn't know if I would graduate on time.”

“I wanted to feel good about myself after I broke up with my boyfriend.”

As described, the majority of the participants reported that they were motivated to see themselves in a self-serving light when they experienced negative events. Because recalling experience of negative events is likely to induce negative affects, the findings of Experiment 2 might have been influenced by such induced negative affects.

Self-esteem and perceptions of media influences. It was expected that people's self-esteem would positively correlate with the extent of third-person perceptions under the threat-to-self-worth condition. However, this expectation was not supported. Likewise, level of self-esteem did not significantly correlate with perceived negative effects on others ($r = .01$, ns) among the threatened participants in the first experiment. However, a marginally significant correlation between self-esteem and perceived negative effects on the self was found to be consistent with expectations ($r = -.29$, $p = .07$).

In a third-person perceptions context, evaluating oneself as less vulnerable to negative media messages would be self-enhancing; this is because resistance to undesirable influences is generally held to be a valued aspect of a self-view. Furthermore, it makes sense that people are

more likely to manifest this attribute as their self-esteem increases. However, although the self-enhancement perspective predicted a positive correlation between self-esteem and perceived negative effects on others, this prediction was not supported ($r = .01$, ns). The finding of a significant negative correlation between self-esteem and perceived negative effects on the self under the threat condition were conceptually consistent with the finding of Brown and Smart's (1991) study, which found that people with high self-esteem are more likely to self-enhance than are people with low self-esteem in terms of responding to self-threats. Likewise, that finding is consistent with that of Meirick's (2002) study, which found that people with high self-esteem perceived themselves as being more resistant to undesirable messages than did people with low self-esteem when threat was present. But, Meirick (2002) also found that people with high self-esteem perceived smaller negative effects on others than did people with low self-esteem—a finding that was not expected from the self-enhancement perspective.

The only correlation that was consistent with the expectation was a negative correlation between self-esteem and perceived negative effects on the self. This finding suggested that the perceived media effects on the self may be a more important source of self-enhancement than the perceived media effects on others or the self–other difference itself in the third-person perceptions context.

For positive media messages, this study found that the extent of first-person perceptions did not vary in relation to level of self-esteem, but perceived positive effects on the self and those on others did vary significantly, particularly under a threat to sense of compassion. The observed marginally significant negative correlation between self-esteem and effects on others was consistent with the relationship expected from the self-enhancement perspective ($r = -.40$, $p = .08$). That is, perceiving others as less receptive to socially desirable influences would be self-

enhancing. In addition, it makes sense that the higher the self-esteem level of people, the more strongly they would manifest this response. Another significant negative correlation between self-esteem and perceived positive media effects on the self was also expected from the self-enhancement explanation through the ego-defensive mechanism ($r = -.54, p = .01$). According to the ego-defensive mechanism, resistance to any media influences would be self-enhancing because people may interpret themselves as maintaining control over their own attitudes by evaluating themselves as invulnerable. Therefore, it follows that the higher the level of self-esteem, the smaller the perceived positive effects on the self. The finding that the correlation between self esteem and the effects on the self is stronger than the correlation with the effects on others supports this idea again: perceived media effect on the self may be a more important source of self-enhancement than perceived media effects on others or the self-other difference itself.

Ego-enhancive versus ego-defensive mechanism. Based on the idea of Duck and Mullin (1995), this study explored whether people perceive socially desirable media effects ego-enhancively or ego-defensively in response to self-enhancement needs. Significant support for the ego-defensive mechanism of the self-enhancement explanation was found for participants with a high enhancement motivation in the first experiment. The participants who received a threat to their sense of compassion rated themselves as being less vulnerable to media influences as their self-esteem increased ($r = -.54, p = .01$), which is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism.

Theoretical Implications

Self-enhancement explanation for perceptions of media influences. The findings of the present study suggest that self-enhancement motivations play a role in constructing perceptions

of media influences particularly when needs for self-enhancement are high. Evidence supporting this suggestion was found in regard to perceptions of media effects on the self under threats to self-worth. But, in terms of the role played by the self-enhancement motivation in constructing perceptions of others and in self–other differences, the evidence was not strongly convincing.

The self-enhancement explanation predicts that, when people receive a threat to their self-worth (which increases the needs for self-enhancement), the extent of perceived beneficial effects as well as perceived harmful effects on the self will decrease.⁵ In other words, if perceptions of media influences are a function of the self-enhancement motivation, attributing smaller harmful as well as beneficial media influences on the self would be self-enhancing. And these self-serving attributions are more likely to manifest as self-esteem level increases. Indeed, these expectations of self-enhancement explanation were fulfilled in this study. In a third-person perceptions context, when their needs for self-enhancement were high, the higher the self-esteem of participants, the more resistant they considered themselves to harmful media influences. In a first-person perceptions context, among the participants who had high needs for self-enhancement, the higher the self-esteem, the weaker the perceived positive effects on the self, which is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. However, this weaker positive effect on the self was observed only in the threat to compassion condition.

In the case of perceived media influences on comparison others, the self-enhancement explanation predicts that people under threat will rate others as more vulnerable to harmful media influences and less influenced by beneficial media messages—both are self-serving responses to threat. Again, it makes sense that the higher the self-esteem, the more likely people are to respond in this way. However, this expectation was only partially supported in this study.

⁵ My data indicated that the participants under threats to compassion perceived beneficial media influences in a way that is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. In this case, attributing smaller beneficial influences on the self would be self-enhancing.

The participants did not make such self-serving responses in a third-person perception context; yet, they did make the self-serving responses in a first-person perceptions context, particularly under threats to compassion. That is, among participants who had increased needs for self-enhancement, the higher the self-esteem of participants, the weaker they considered beneficial media influences to be on comparison others. But, in a third-person perceptions context, level of self-esteem was not significantly correlated with perceptions of harmful influences on others.

In the light of this reasoning, it is not surprising to find that the extent of the self–other differences did not vary by level of self-esteem in the first-person perceptions context under threats to compassion. This finding is in line with what the self-enhancement explanation expects: this is because people enhance their self-views by thinking not only that they are more resistant to even positive media influences, but also that others are less receptive to positive influences. However, the finding of the nonsignificant relationship between level of self-esteem and self-other differences in a third-person perceptions context was not consistent with the self-enhancement perspective.

The role of self-esteem on perceptions of media influences. All significant findings discussed in the preceding section suggest that the self-enhancement motivation alone is not sufficient to account for perceptions of media influence. Indeed, the present study did not find any significant differences between the high self-enhancement condition and the low self-enhancement condition in terms of effects on the self, effects on others, and the corresponding self–other differences without considering self-esteem level.⁶ In addition, these significant findings were evident only when participants had high needs for self-enhancement. Therefore,

⁶ The high self-enhancement conditions were the threat to self-worth condition in Experiment 1 and the primed self-enhancement condition in Experiment 2. The low self-enhancement conditions were the non-threat to self-worth condition in Experiment 1 and the primed self-assessment condition in Experiment 2.

the self-enhancement explanation for perceptions of media influences might be interpreted within specific circumstances.

The findings of the present study indicated that the self-enhancement explanation is significantly viable only for high-self-esteem people particularly when they have increased needs for self-enhancement. Although the perceptions of media influences varied to some degree by the level of self-enhancement motivation, the variations were not statistically significant. For example, perceived negative influences on the self were greater in the high self-enhancement condition ($M = 2.48, SE = .27$) than in the low self-enhancement condition ($M = 2.18, SE = .27$). In addition, perceived positive influences on the self were smaller in the high self-enhancement condition ($M = 6.12, SE = .32$) than in the low self-enhancement condition ($M = 6.42, SE = .32$). These nonsignificant variations suggest that, although self-enhancement motivation affects people's perceptions of media influences to some degree, this motivation is not sufficient to explain third- and first-person perceptions overall. Therefore, this study concludes that the self-enhancement explanation may not be a leading explanation for perceptions of media influences.

Ego-enhancive versus ego-defensive. The question of whether people estimate beneficial media influences in a way that is consistent with the ego-enhancive mechanism or the ego-defensive mechanism was tested by three sets of opposing hypotheses in this present study. Among these hypotheses, three hypotheses were expected to support the ego-enhancive mechanism, and the other three attempted to support the ego-defensive mechanism.

Overall, participants in this study seemed to perceive beneficial media influences in a way consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. However, significant support for this mechanism was obtained only in one hypothesis (Hypothesis 6). It was found that the participants with increased needs for self-enhancement perceived positive media effects on

themselves more ego-defensively as their self-esteem increased under threats to compassion. In other words, the higher their self-esteem, the weaker they considered the positive effects on themselves, which is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. Although the other two hypotheses were not significantly supported, they revealed similar patterns. For example, the analysis of Hypothesis 3 in Experiment 1 indicated that participants who were threatened perceived themselves as being less influenced by positive media message ($M = 6.12$, $SE = .32$) than those who were unthreatened ($M = 6.41$, $SE = .32$). Similarly, in examining each threatened dimension separately, this pattern was consistently found for the compassion dimension (positive effects on the self; $M = 6.35$, $SE = .46$ for the threatened; $M = 6.89$, $SE = .45$ for the unthreatened) and for the cognitive ability dimension (positive effects on the self; $M = 5.89$, $SE = .45$ for the threatened; $M = 5.94$, $SE = .45$ for the unthreatened).

Although evidence was not very convincing, one significant finding together with the patterns that emerged through testing the other two hypotheses suggested that people may perceive positive media messages in a way that is consistent with ego-defensive mechanism.

Evidence for the ego-defensive mechanism raises an important issue in regard to the self-enhancement explanation for first-person perceptions. That is, if this mechanism is a default way to perceive positive media effects on the self, the self-enhancement explanation may not account for first-person perceptions. According to the self-enhancement explanation, perceived positive media effects on others should decrease as needs for self-enhancement increase. Therefore, if the ego-defensive mechanism is the default, it would be expected that needs for self-enhancement would negatively correlate with positive effects on the self as well as those on others, so self-other differences (first-person perceptions) in this case should not be large. Consequently, first-person perceptions should not be explained by needs for self-enhancement. Although this

experiment could not strongly support this idea due to lack of significant findings, there was one significant finding that supports this idea. It was found that, among the participants under threats to compassion, the higher the self-esteem, the weaker the beneficial media effects on the self and those on others.

The idea of overestimation and underestimation of media influences. The idea of overestimation versus underestimation of media influences was raised to examine whether or not third-person perceptions stem from a psychological distortion (R. M. Perloff, 1999). In exploring this idea, Salwen (1998) suggested that third-person perceptions might result from a tendency to underestimate media influence on the self, overestimate media influence on others, or a combination of the two. However, this idea alone could not explain the third-person-perceptions phenomena because of the absence of supporting theoretical mechanisms. Only a handful of studies have examined the idea of overestimation and underestimation. Those studies have found evidence for both tendencies. Some studies supported the overestimation tendency (R. M. Perloff, 1989; Price, Tewksbury, & Huang, 1998), other studies found support for the underestimation tendency (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988) and some other studies supported both tendencies (Gunther & Thorson, 1992). In addition, this idea has not been clearly explored in a reversed third-person perceptions (first-person perceptions) context.

In a third-person perceptions context, the present study supported the underestimation tendency, but it failed to support the overestimation tendency. That is, the higher the participants' self-esteem under the threat condition, the more likely they were to underestimate harmful media influences on themselves. This tendency was resulted by needs for self-enhancement. In other words, to the extent that people are motivated to enhance their positive

self-views, they tend to underestimate negative media effects on themselves. So, in this case, needs for self-enhancement is a viable theoretical mechanism for the underestimation tendency.

In a first-person perceptions (reversed third-person perceptions) context, the direction of underestimation and/or overestimation of media effects should be reversed. Whereas it was suggested that third-person perceptions might be resulted from a tendency to underestimate negative media effects on the self and/or a tendency to overestimate the effects on comparison others, first- person perceptions might be resulted from underestimating the positive media effects on comparison others and/or overestimating the effects on the self. The evidence for this idea in regard to first-person perceptions was found in the threat-to-compassion condition. That is, the higher the participants' self-esteem, the more likely they were to underestimate positive media effects on themselves as well as on others. This finding suggests that if first-person perceptions are a function of self-enhancement needs, people may underestimate positive media effects on others, as expected. In addition, they may also underestimate the effects on themselves. These suggestions are consistent with self-enhancement, but are not what the idea of underestimation and/or overestimation would predict. Therefore, in a first-person perceptions context, overestimations of positive media effects on the self may be less likely to occur.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

In spite of the implications described above, it is important to acknowledge the limitations associated with the present study that suggest additional avenues for future study. In describing the limitations, general limitations were reviewed first, followed by those specific to the present study.

Sample. The present study used college students as participants and artificial data collection settings; such techniques always limit the generalizability of findings. Particularly for

third-person perceptions studies, Paul et al. (2000) in their meta analysis of the perceptual hypothesis found that convenient student samples yield greater third-person perceptions than do nonstudent samples. In explaining this finding, they argued that, “from a theoretical perspective, research suggests that respondents with high levels of self-assessed knowledge, such as college students often studied in nonrandom samples, might exhibit greater third-person perception because they evaluate themselves as smarter than other people” (p. 78). The limitation of employing students as participants, therefore, might diminish confidence in such studies’ findings. However, this limitation would not significantly affect the confidence of the findings in the present study for this reason: if this study had attempted to examine only third- and first-person perceptions, convenient student samples would be open to questioning; however, the present study was designed to detect differences in the extent of perceptions of media influences based on experimental manipulations of self-enhancement motivations. So, different findings would be less likely to be observed for a sample drawn from the general public.

However, if a ceiling on the participants’ vigilance on resistance to media influences is accurate explanation for some null findings of the present study, using a sample from the general public would be preferable. If a ceiling on the public’s vigilance is much higher than that on the students in this study, the general public may have more room for self-enhancement by expressing stronger third- and/or first-person perceptions. As a consequence, future researchers would be wise to take samples from the general public to test the self-enhancement explanation for perceptions of media influences.

Extreme desirability of messages. Paul and his colleagues (2000) pointed out that operationally defining media messages as undesirable or desirable based on researchers’ assumptions is dubious in terms of validity. A more valid definition would have respondents

evaluating message desirability. Indeed, the desirability of messages used in the present study was estimated by the study's participants.

However, the media messages tested in this study seemed too much undesirable or desirable to examine perceptions of media influences (see Table 1 for perceived desirability of the messages tested). Consequently, extreme message desirability might contribute in part to the null findings for perceptions of media effects on the self. For example, if all the participants thought the depiction of racism had very harmful influences, they would not perceive themselves as influenced by that depiction beyond a certain limit whether or not they had high self-enhancement motivations. Using messages that are less obviously undesirable would avoid this limitation. By using less undesirable messages, future studies may create sufficient room for self-enhancement under the ceiling for stronger resistance to undesirable media effects particularly in the face of a threat to self-worth.

Negative affect as a potential confound. As described in the section of Summary of Findings, negative affects might have been induced among participants who received threats to self-worth and who were asked to describe when they want to behave in a way that consistent with self-enhancement. If this was the case, some of findings of the present study might be interpreted in terms of negative affects rather than needs for self-enhancement. Also, induced negative affects and needs for self-enhancement may have an impact on perceptions of media effects in an opposite direction. For example, it is conceivable that needs for self-enhancement are positively related to a self-serving bias (Brown & Smart, 1991) whereas negative affects are negatively related to it (Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). Thus, it is suspected that some of null findings obtained in this study might have accrued because of the opposing effects of negative affects and needs for self-enhancement on perceptions of media influences.

Future studies focusing on manipulating self-enhancement motivations should be careful to avoid such effects of induced affects. A possible way to avoid mood effects may be found in Riketta and Dauenheimer's (2003) study. They found that when "participants were subliminally exposed to either negative or positive adjectives paired with a self-referring word ('I')," a self-serving bias was stronger (p. 679). In contrast, when those same adjectives were paired with non self-referring words (for example, an unusual personal name), the self-serving bias did not alter. Riketta and Dauenheimer (2003) suggested that this method only alters self-serving bias without inducing affects. This study might be a good starting point for future works attempting to manipulate needs for self-enhancement.

Additional suggestion for testing the self-enhancement explanation. In examining the correlations between self-esteem and perceived media effects on the self or those on comparison others, it was found that the effects on the self and the effects on others were highly positively correlated. Although, in a third-person perceptions context, those two effects would be negatively correlated because self-esteem was expected to negatively correlate with the effects on the self and positively correlated with the effects on others, it was not observed in this study.

In Experiment 1, the correlation between those two effects for negative media messages was $.57$ ($p < .001$) and the correlation for positive media messages was $.78$ ($p < .001$). In Experiment 2 the correlation for negative messages was $.30$ ($p = .05$) and the correlation for positive media messages was $.56$ ($p < .001$). These positive correlations might be observed because the media effects on the self and those on other was measured as a within subject factor. That is, to the extent that information about comparison others was used to evaluate ourselves and vice versa, it might make sense to expect the means of perceived effects on the self and those on others to move together in the same direction. Consequently, future researchers who are

interested in testing the self-enhancement explanation would be wise to measure the perceived effects on the self and those on others as a between subject factor.

There was one study that measured those effects as a between subjects factor (David, Liu, & Myser, 2004). In this study, David et al. (2004) conducted two different experiments for examining the robustness of third- and first-person perceptions. In the first experiment, they measured the effects on the self and those on others as a within subject factor. In the second experiment, these effects were measured as a between-subject factor for the same messages were tested in the first experiment. They found that third-person perceptions continued to persist, whereas first-person perceptions were only significant in the first experiment. In explaining these results, David et al. (2004) argued that types of social comparison (direct social comparisons in the first experiment versus indirect social comparisons in the second experiment) might affect the extent of perceptions of media influences. So, if future studies measure perceived media effects on the self and those on others as a between subject factor as David et al.'s (2004) study did in its second experiment, they may be able to avoid the tendency of highly positive correlation between those effects that was found in the present study. Because people do not use information about comparison others to evaluate themselves and vice versa, the mean of perceived effects on the self and those on other may not move together in the same direction.

Final Remarks

In closing, it appears that the need for self-enhancement plays a role in people's perceptions of media influence. However, this role might be more evident for high self-esteem individuals than it for those with low self-esteem. In third- and first-person perception contexts, the perceived media influences on the self might be more important sources for self-enhancement than those on comparison others. Particularly in regard to perceptions of beneficial

media influences, it appears that people evaluate media influences in a way that is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism.

It seems nothing is more exciting to researchers than a regularly occurring phenomenon that fails to adhere to a single clear-cut explanation. In the past, although a number of psychological and social psychological theories and frameworks have been suggested for third-person perceptions, researchers have yet to reach a consensus in regard to the underlying mechanism(s) of these perceptual discrepancies. According to third-person effect literature, one recurring theme is the notion that people have a tendency to evaluate themselves more favorably than they evaluate comparison others. The self-enhancement explanation, which has been suggested as the most prevailing explanation for third-person perceptions, argues that people are motivated to maintain or enhance their positive self-views by perceiving themselves as more resistant to negative or socially undesirable media effects than other people. It has also been suggested that self-enhancement needs may play an important role in first-person perceptions; that is, self-enhancement needs may account for first-person perceptions in that people may perceive themselves as being more receptive to positive or socially desirable media effects than are comparison others, and that, in turn, this perception leads to a reinforcement or enhancement of a positive self-view.

The present study conducted two experiments to find empirical support for the self-enhancement explanation. The research findings of the current study suggest that manipulated self-enhancement needs alone are not sufficient to explain third-person and first-person perceptions. However, when a person's self-esteem level is considered in tandem with the extent of his/her self-enhancement needs, the self-enhancement explanation becomes a viable account for both third- and first-person perceptions. In the third-person perceptions context, people with

higher self-esteem show stronger resistance to negative media influences than do people with lower self-esteem when they have increased needs for self-enhancement. In the first-person perceptions context, people with high self-esteem considered stronger positive media effects on themselves and those on comparison others. These research findings suggest that the self-enhancement explanation alone may not be a sufficient explanation for the recurring phenomenon of third-person perceptions. That is, to account for the recurring phenomenon of third-person perceptions, differences at the individual level such as self-esteem require consideration. In addition, this explanation may not justify first-person perceptions phenomena if people evaluate positive media effects in a way that is consistent with the ego-defensive mechanism. In consequence, the present study suspects that the self-enhancement explanation may not be a leading explanation for discrepant perceptions of media influences. For this study the role of self-enhancement remains in dispute.

As described in the Summary of Findings, this study failed to support the expectation that a threat to self-worth increases the extent of third-person and first-person perceptions. Inhering in this expectation was the assumption that perceived cognitive ability and perceived sense of compassion would prove to be valuable aspects of self-view. It was, therefore, expected that people would show strong third-person and first-person perceptions when their self-worth was threatened; it was assumed that they could restore their impugned self-views by perceiving their superiority over comparison others in terms of resistance to negative media effects and receptiveness to positive media effects. A number of studies suggest that self-concept is multidimensional (Harrison, 2006; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). Harrison (2006) argued that the “self-concept is composed of multiple aspects, not all of which are salient at any given time, and not all of which remain stable throughout life” (p. 251). Linville (1985) defined this

multidimensional characteristic of the self-concept as “self-complexity.” According to Linville (1985), people use many aspects to identify who they are, and there are individual differences in terms of the number and types of these aspects. Several studies have reported that people used to evaluate their cognitive ability and/or sense of compassion as an important aspect of their self-concept (Aronson, Blanton, & Cooper, 1995; Brown & Smart, 1991; Steele & Liu, 1983). However, no study has examined how important third-person and first-perceptions are for composing one’s positive self-concept. If the perception of one’s superiority over comparison others in terms of resistance to negative media effects is not a valuable aspect of a positive self-concept, people will not be able to restore their threatened self-concepts by reporting those perceptions. At least, based on how important those perceptions are for their self-concept, the extent that people restore or enhance their self-concept by showing strong third-person perceptions will vary. In other words, the extent to which people experience those perceptions as important to their self-concept, is the extent to which they are likely to be motivated to report stronger third-person perceptions—particularly when they have increased self-enhancement needs. It is, therefore, important to establish how important or central those perceptions are for composing one’s self-concept particularly in testing the self-enhancement explanation. Without establishing such, it is difficult to test the idea that third-person perceptions are a function of the self-enhancement motivation; this is so because it is not clear whether people enhance their self-concept through perceiving that they are better than comparison others in terms of resistance to negative media effects. It would be worthwhile for future researchers to test how people use discrepant perceptions of media effects in defining their self-concept as a necessary first step to testing the self-enhancement explanation.

References

- Aronson, J., Blanton, H., & Cooper, N. J. (1995). From dissonance to disidentification: Selectivity in the self-affirmation process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, 986-996.
- Banning, S. A. (2001). Do you see what I see?: Third-person effects on public communication through self-esteem, social stigma, and product use. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4, 127-147.
- Barone, M. J., Miniard, P. W., & Romeo, J. B. (2000). The Influence of positive mood on brand extension evaluations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26, 386-400.
- Beauregard, K. S., & Dunning, D. (1998). Turning up the contrast: Self-enhancement motives prompt egocentric effects in social judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74, 606-621.
- Brosius, H., & Engel, D. (1996). The causes of third-person effects: Unrealistic optimism, impersonal impact, or generalized negative attitudes towards media influence? *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 8, 142-162.
- Brown, J. D. (1986). Evaluations of self and others: Self enhancement biases in social judgments. *Social Cognition*, 4, 353-376.
- Brown, J. D. (1990). Evaluating one's abilities: Shortcuts and stumbling blocks on the road to self-knowledge. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 26, 149-167.
- Brown, J. D., & Gallagher, F. M. (1992). Coming to terms with failure: Private self-enhancement and public self-effacement. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 28, 3-22.
- Brown, J. D., & Smart, S. A. (1991). The self and social conduct: Liking self-representations to prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 368-375.
- Campbell, J., & Tesser, A. (1986). Self-evaluation maintenance processes in relationships. In S. Duck & D. Perlman (Eds.), *Understanding personal relationships: An interdisciplinary approach* (Vol. 1, pp. 107-305). London: Sage.
- Campbell, J. D. (1986). Similarity and uniqueness: The effects of attribute type, relevance, and individual differences in self-esteem and depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 50, 281-294.
- Chapin, J. R. (2000). Third-person perception and optimistic bias among urban minority at-risk youth. *Communication Research*, 27, 51-81.
- Chen, H., Yates, B. T., & McGinnies, E. (1988). Effects of involvement on observers' estimates of consensus, distinctiveness, and consistency. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 14, 468-478.

- Choi, I., Nisbett, R. E., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). Causal attribution across cultures: Variation and universality. *Psychological Bulletin*, *125*, 47-63.
- Cohen, J., Mutz, D., Price, V., & Gunther, A. (1988). Perceived impact of defamation: An experiment on third-person effects. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *52*, 161-173.
- David, P., Liu, K., & Myser, M. (2004). Methodological artifact or persistent bias?: Testing the robustness of the third-person and reverse third-person effects for alcohol messages. *Communication Research*, *31*, 206-233.
- Davison, W. P. (1983). The third-person effect in communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *47*, 1-15.
- Duck, J. M., & Mullin, B. A. (1995). The perceived impact of the mass media: Reconsidering the third person effect. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *25*, 77-93.
- Duck, J. M., Terry, D. J., & Hogg, M. A. (1995). The perceived influence of AIDS advertising: Third-person effects in the context of positive media content *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *17*, 305-325.
- Dunning, D., Leuenberger, A., & Sherman, D. A. (1995). A new look at motivated inference: Are self-service theories of success a product of motivational forces? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*, 58-68.
- Eveland, W. P. J., & McLeod, D. M. (1999). The effect of social desirability on perceived media impact: Implications for third-person perceptions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *11*, 315-333.
- Fiske, S. T. (2003). Five core social motives, plus or minus five. In S. J. Spencer, S. Fein, M. Zanna, P. & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *Motivated social perception: The Ontario symposium* (Vol. 9, pp. 233-246). Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition* (2 ed.). New York, NY: Mcgraw Hill Book Company.
- Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history. *American Psychologist*, *35*, 603-618.
- Gunther, A. C. (1991). What we think others think: Cause and consequence in the third person effect. *Communication Research*, *18*, 355-372.
- Gunther, A. C., & Hwa, A. P. (1996). Public perceptions of television influence and opinions about censorship in singapore *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *8*, 248-265.
- Gunther, A. C., & Mundy, P. (1993). Biased optimism and the third-person effect. *Journalism Quarterly*, *70*, 58-67.

- Gunther, A. C., & Thorson, E. (1992). Perceived persuasive effects of product commercials public service announcements: Third-person effects in new domains. *Communication Research, 18*, 355-372.
- Harrison, K. (2006). Scope of self: Toward a model of television's effects on self-complexity in adolescence. *communication Theory, 16*, 251-279.
- Heider, F. (1958). *The psychology of interpersonal relations*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D. R. (1997). The cultural construction of self-enhancement: An examination of group-serving biases. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 1268-1283.
- Hoorens, V., & Ruiter, S. (1996). The optimal impact phenomenon: Beyond the third person effect. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 26*, 599-610.
- Innes, J. M., & Zeith, H. (1988). The public's view of the impact of the mass media: A test of the 'third person' effect. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 18*, 457-463.
- John, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1871). *The actor and observer: Divergent perception of the causes of behavior: Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior*, Morristown, NJ: General learning press.
- Kanagawa, C., Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. (2001). "Who am I?" The cultural psychology of the conceptual self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27*, 90-103.
- Langer, E. J., & Roth, J. (1975). Heads I win, tails it's chance: The illusion of control as a function of the sequence of outcomes in a purely chance task. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 32*, 951-955.
- Lewicki, P. (1983). Self-image bias in person perception. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 384-393.
- Linville, P. W. (1985). Self-complexity and affective extremity: Don't put all of your eggs in one cognitive basket. *Social Cognition, 3*, 94-120.
- Markus, H., & Kitayama, S. (1991). *Cultural variation in self-concept*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- McLeod, D. M., Detenber, B. H., & Eveland, W. P. J. (2001). Behind the third-person effect: Differentiating perceptual processes for self and other. *Journal of Communication, 51*, 678-695.
- Meirick, P. C. (2002). *Self-enhancement, self-affirmation and threats to self-worth: Three tests of a motivational explanation for first- and third-person effects*. University of Minnesota.

- Meirick, P. C. (2003). *Self-esteem, self-affirmation and threats to self-worth: Testing a motivational explanation for the third-person effect*. Paper presented at the the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Kansas City, MO.
- Miller, G. R., & Steinberg, M. (1975). *Between people: A new analysis of interpersonal communication*. Chicago: Science Research Associates.
- Mutz, D. C. (1989). The influence of perceptions of media influence: Third person effects and the public expression of opinions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 1*, 3-23.
- Paul, B., Salwen, M. B., & Dupagne, M. (2000). The third-person effect: A meta-analysis of the perceptual hypothesis. *Mass Communication & Society, 3*, 57-85.
- Peiser, W., & Peter, J. (2001). Explaining individual differences in third-person perception. *Communication Research, 28*, 156-180.
- Perloff, L. S., & Fetzer, B. K. (1986). Self-other judgments and perceived vulnerability to victimization. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*, 502-510.
- Perloff, R. M. (1989). Ego-involvement and the third person effect of televised news coverage. *Communication Research, 16*, 236-262.
- Perloff, R. M. (1996). Perceptions and conceptions of political media impact: The third-person effect and beyond. In A. N. Crigler (Ed.), *The Psychology of Political Communication* (pp. 188-198). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Perloff, R. M. (1999). The third-person effect: A critical review and synthesis. *Media Psychology, 1*, 353-378.
- Perloff, R. M. (2002). The third-person effect. In D. Zillmann (Ed.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (2 ed., pp. 489-506). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Price, V., Tewksbury, D., & Huang, L.-N. (1998). Third-person effects on publication of a holocaust-denial advertisement. *Journal of Communication, 48*, 3-26.
- Pyszczynski, T., & Greenberg, J. (1987). Toward an integration of cognitive and motivational perspectives on social inference: A biased hypothesis-testing model. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 20, pp. 297-340). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Riketta, M., & Dauenheimer, D. (2003). Manipulating self-esteem with subliminally presented words. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 33*, 679-699.
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-esteem*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Salwen, M. B. (1998). Perceptions of media influence and support for censorship: The third-person effect in the 1996 presidential election. *Communication Research, 25*, 259-285.
- Sedikides, C. (1993). Assessment, enhancement, and verification determinants of the social evaluation process. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65*, 317-338.
- Sedikides, C. (1999). Assessment, enhancement, and verification determinants of the social evaluation process. In R. F. Baumeister (Ed.), *The self in social psychology* (pp. 402-425). Ann Arbor, MI: Edwards Brother.
- Sedikides, C., & Strube, M. J. (1997). Self evaluation: To thine own self be good, to thine own self be sure, to thine own self be true, and to thine own self be better. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 29, pp. 209-269). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Steele, C. M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 21*, 261-301.
- Steele, C. M., & Liu, T. J. (1983). Dissonance processes as self-affirmation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 5-19.
- Tabachnik, N., Crocker, J., & Alloy, L. B. (1983). Depression, social comparison, and the false-consensus effect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 45*, 688-699.
- Taylor, S. E. (1991). Asymmetrical effects of positive and negative events: The mobilization-minimization hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 67-85.
- Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin, 103*, 193-210.
- Taylor, S. E., & Lobel, M. (1989). Social comparison activity under threat: Downward evaluation and upward contacts. *Psychological Review, 96*, 569-575.
- Taylor, S. E., Neter, E., & Wayment, H. A. (1995). Self-evaluation processes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 21*, 1278-1287.
- Taylor, S. E., Wayment, H. A., & Carrillo, M. (1996). Social comparison, self-regulation, and motivation In R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation and cognition: The interpersonal context* (Vol. 3, pp. 3-27). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Trope, Y. (1980). Self-assessment, self-enhancement, and task preference. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 16*, 116-129.
- Trope, Y. (1986). Self-enhancement and self-assessment in achievement behavior. In R. M. Sorrentino & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior* (pp. 350-378). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Weinstein, N. D. (1980). Unrealistic optimism about future life events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39, 806-820.

Wills, T. A. (1991). Downward comparison principles in social psychology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 245-271.

Appendix A: Cognitive Flexibility Test

The difficult version of test

Cognitive Flexibility Test

Instructions: Below is a short form of the ‘Cognitive Flexibility Test,’ a test of “outside-the-box” reasoning that has been shown to be related to college GPA and scores on standardized tests such as the GRE and LSAT. Each item consists of three words that are somehow related to a fourth word. Your job is to write down that fourth word in the blank provided. You have five minutes to finish this test.

Example: Elephant-Lapse-Vivid _____ (Answer: Memory)

1. Bass-Complex-Sleep _____
2. Chamber-Staff-Box _____
3. Desert-Ice-Spell _____
4. Base-Snow-Dance _____
5. Inch-Deal-Peg _____
6. Soap-Sell-Tissue _____
7. Blood-Music-Cheese _____
8. Skunk-Kings-Boiled _____
9. Jump-Kill-Bliss _____
10. Shopping-Washer-Picture _____

How would you rate your performance on the Cognitive Flexibility Test?

Poor						Excellent	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

How would you rate your own level of cognitive flexibility?

Poor						Excellent	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

The easy version of test

Cognitive Flexibility Test

Instructions: Below is a short form of the ‘Cognitive Flexibility Test,’ a test of “outside-the-box” reasoning that has been shown to be related to college GPA and scores on standardized tests such as the GRE and LSAT. Each item consists of three words that are somehow related to a fourth word. Your job is to write down that fourth word in the blank provided. You have five minutes to finish this test.

Example: Elephant-Lapse-Vivid _____ (Answer: Memory)

1. Athletes-Webbed-Rabbit _____
2. Shelf-Read-End _____
3. Sea-Home-Stomach _____
4. Car-Swimming-Cue _____
5. Board-Magic-Death _____
6. Walker-Main-Sweeper _____
7. Cookies-Sixteen-Heart _____
8. Chocolate-Fortune-Jar _____
9. Lounge-Hour-Drink _____
10. Keel-Show-Row _____

How would you rate your performance on the Cognitive Flexibility Test?

Poor							Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How would you rate your own level of cognitive flexibility?

Poor							Excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B: Feedback forms

The difficult version of test

Feedback Form

Below are the answers to the Cognitive Flexibility Test you just took. You may take a moment to look them over. Your score is recorded at the bottom of the page, along with your ranking compared to a national sample of college students.

Question	Answer
1. Bass Complex Sleep	Deep
2. Chamber-Staff-Box	Music
3. Desert-Ice-Spell	Dry
4. Base-Snow-Dance	Ball
5. Inch-Deal-Peg	Square
6. Soap-Sell-Tissue	Soft
7. Blood-Music-Cheese	Blue
8. Skunk-Kings-Boiled	Cabbage
9. Jump-Kill-Bliss	Joy
10. Shopping-Washer-Picture	Window

Your score: _____ correct answers out of 10.

You rank in the _____th percentile among college students nationwide.

The easy version of test

Feedback Form

Below are the answers to the Cognitive Flexibility Test you just took. You may take a moment to look them over. Your score is recorded at the bottom of the page, along with your ranking compared to a national sample of college students.

Question	Answer
1. Athletes Webbed Rabbit	Foot
2. Shelf Read End	Book
3. Sea Home Stomach	Sick
4. Car Swimming Cue	Pool
5. Board Magic Death	Black
6. Walker Main Sweeper	Street
7. Cookies-Sixteen-Heart	Sweet
8. Chocolate-Fortune-Jar	Cookie
9. Lounge-Hour-Drink	Cocktail
10. Keel-Show-Row	Boat

Your score: _____ correct answers out of 10.

You rank in the _____th percentile among college students nationwide.

Appendix C: Descriptions and Questionnaires for Measuring Third- and First-Person Perceptions

For anti-social messages:

1) Statement: There has been much publicity in recent years suggesting a link between the depiction of violence in the media and aggressive behavior.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to act more aggressively by the depiction of violence in the media? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to act more aggressively by the depiction of violence in the media?

2) Statement: In recent years people have been concerned about the negative effects of the depiction of racism in the media. For example, it may encourage viewers to adopt racist attitudes toward Blacks.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to display racist behaviors and attitudes by the depiction of racism in the media? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to display racist behaviors and attitudes by the depiction of racism in the media?

3) Statement: In recent years, there have been a number of media commercials aimed at encouraging people to buy diet pills.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to buy diet pills by such media commercials? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to buy diet pills by such media commercials?

For pro-social messages:

4) Statement: The depiction of positive, pro-social behaviors in the mass media such as helping, sharing, cooperation and neighborly interactions might have a positive influence on viewers.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to behave more pro-socially by such depiction of positive behaviors in the media? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to behave more pro-socially by such depiction of positive behaviors in the media?

5) Statement: Recently there have been many media campaigns aimed at promoting safe sex, for example, those stressing the benefits of using condoms.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to engage in safe sex by such campaigns? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to engage in safe sex by such campaigns?

6) Statement: In recent years, there have been a number of advertising campaigns aimed at encouraging people to wear seat-belts and thus avoid injury.

Questions: (1) To what extent do you think other people would be influenced to wear seat-belts by such campaigns? (2) To what extent do you think you would be influenced to wear seat-belts by such campaigns?

Vitae: Sangki Lee

Research and Teaching Interests

Social and Psychological Effects of Mass Media
Mass Communication Theories
Communication Technologies
Social Science Research Methods

Published Journal Articles

Bhattacharya, S., Helsel, J., Hu, Y., Lee, S., Kim, J., Kim, S., Michael, P. W., Park, J., Sager, S. S., Seo, S., Stark, C., & Yeo, B. Anne Hoag, Supervising Professor (2003). A literature review of computers and pedagogy for journalism and mass communication education. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* (under the section entitled "The Graduate Teaching Academy"), 57, 399-412.

Journal Articles Under Review

Oliver, M. B., Yang, H., Ramasubramanian, S., Kim, J., & Lee, S. Exploring a reinforcement model of perceived media influence on self and others. Paper submitted to *Communication Research* (resubmitted after 1st revision).

Competitively Selected Conference Presentations

Lee, S., Shen, F. (Aug. 2005). *Party affiliation, political ad perceptions and political involvement: Evidence from the 2004 Presidential campaign*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, Texas.

Oliver, M. B., Yang, H., Ramasubramanian, S., Kim, J., & Lee, S. (Aug. 2004). *Exploring a reinforcement model of perceived media influence on self and others*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Toronto, Canada.

Oliver, M. B., Ramasubramanian, S., Yang, H., Kim, J., & Lee, S. (May 2004). *The importance of allowing for diversity of opinion in the examination of third-person perceptions*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Lee, S., Yang, H., Kim, J., & Stavrositu, C. (May 2004). *Effects of multimedia and sensationalism on processing and perceptions of on-line news*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Chung, D., Lee, S., & Lewis, N. (July 2002). *Loneliness and interpersonal relationship in computer-mediated communication*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Seoul, South Korea.