



Implications of Primal World Beliefs for Positive Relationship Illusions, Dyadic Empathy, and Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract

The current research examines the role of primal world beliefs in predicting positive relationship illusions, which is a strong predictor of romantic relationship quality. Enticing primals predicted positive illusions about romantic partners’ characteristics and behaviors. In turn, positive relationship illusions significantly predicted greater daily empathy and greater daily satisfaction for both partners, and enticing primals indirectly predicted these outcomes through positive illusions.

Introduction

- People in romantic relationships often formulate positive illusions about their respective partners, which has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of relationship satisfaction. [1] [2] [3]
- Prior research has pointed to self-esteem as a significant predictor of positive illusions. People with high self-esteem are more likely to hold positive relationship illusions relative to people with low self-esteem. [4] [5]
- People’s beliefs about the world may also be important. Worldviews often motivate behaviors and affect the way people interpret stimuli. [6]
- Recent research identifies a set of 26 basic world beliefs, known as primals. Primals concern how an individual views the world’s overall character and include three major dimensions : seeing the world as safe (vs. dangerous), enticing (vs. dull), or alive (vs. mechanistic). [7]
 - Those high in the safe primal see the world as comforting and with few threats.
 - Those high in the enticing primal view the world as interesting, full of opportunities, and worth exploring.
 - Those high in the alive primal tend to see the world as interacting with them and changing.
- This study hypothesized that primals predict positive relationship illusions independently of self-esteem and, through positive illusions, enhance relationship quality.

Methods– Participants

- Both members of 116 romantic couples (86% mixed-sex, 12% same-sex females, and 2% including a gender nonconforming member).
- 46% men, 52% women, 2% non-binary (Mage = 32 years; SD = 10.90)
- 70% White, 17% Asian/Asian American, 10% Black/African American, 10% Hispanic/Latino American, and 7% indicating other identities.

Methods– Procedure

- Participants completed an intake questionnaire where they provided informed consent and demographic information.
- Participants then completed 14 consecutive daily questionnaires (2,080 total observations, M = 8.97 person).
- Participants nominated friend informants to complete a survey about them. 167 participants were reported on by at least one friend informant (14 reported on by 4 informants; 22 reported on by 3 informants; 53 reported on by 2 informants; and 78 reported on by 1 informant).

Methods– Measures

Intake Measures

Self-Esteem: Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) answered on a 7-point response scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree; $\alpha = .89$; e.g., “I feel that I have a number of good qualities”).

Methods– Measures Cont.

Enticing Primals: 28-item measure assessing fundamental beliefs of how enticing the world is (Clifton et al., 2019) answered on a 7-point response scale (1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree; $\alpha = .93$; e.g., “There is beauty everywhere, no matter where we look.”).

Daily Measures

Daily Evaluation of Partner: 4-item measure assessing perception of partner morality, warmth, competence, and global evaluation answered on a 5-point response scale (1: very slightly; 5: extremely; $\alpha = .81$; e.g., “Today, how morally bad or morally good was [Partner Name]?”).

Daily Partner Self-Evaluation: 4-item measure assessing self-perception on analogous items answered on a 5-point response scale (1: very slightly; 5: extremely; $\alpha = .74$; e.g., “Today, how morally bad or morally good were you?”).

Daily Satisfaction: 1-item measure assessing relationship satisfaction answered on a 5-point response scale (1: very slightly; 5: extremely; e.g., “Today, how satisfied did you feel in your relationship with [Partner Name]?”).

Daily Empathy: average of 3-item measure answered on a 5-point response scale (1: very slightly; 5: extremely; $\alpha = .83$; e.g., “Today, I felt what [Partner Name] was feeling.”).

Friend Informant Evaluation

Evaluation of partner on 7 warmth adjectives (e.g., caring), 4 competence adjectives (e.g., intelligent), and 11 morality adjectives (e.g., trustworthy) answered on a 5-point response scale (1: not at all; 5: extremely).

Results

Analyses were conducted using multilevel modeling. Models treated daily assessments as nested within dyads. Indirect effects were tested using the Monte Carlo method with 20,000 simulations.

Figure 1. The Effect of Enticing Primals on Daily Partner Evaluations While Controlling for Self-Esteem and Partners’ Daily Self-Evaluations

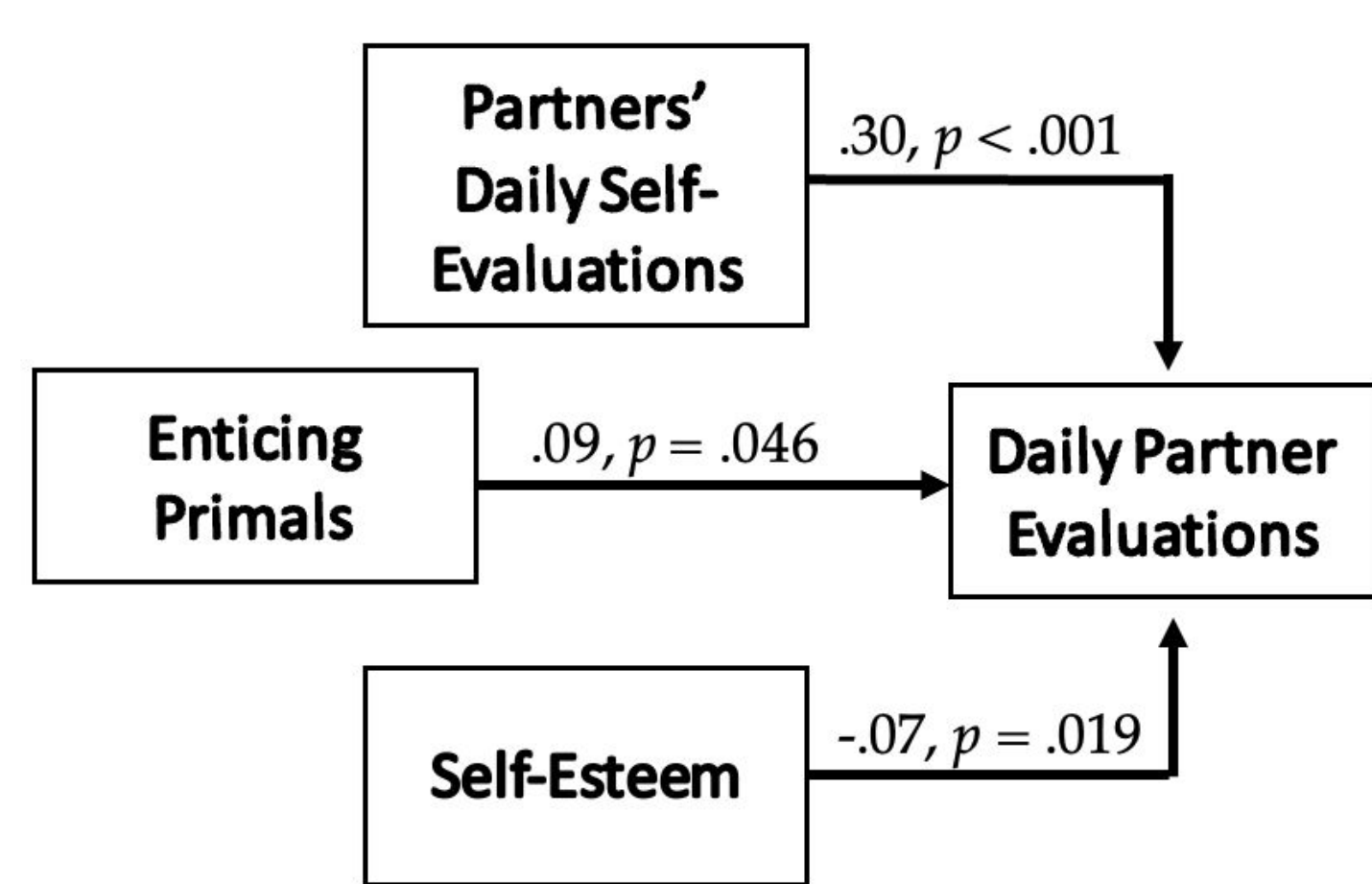
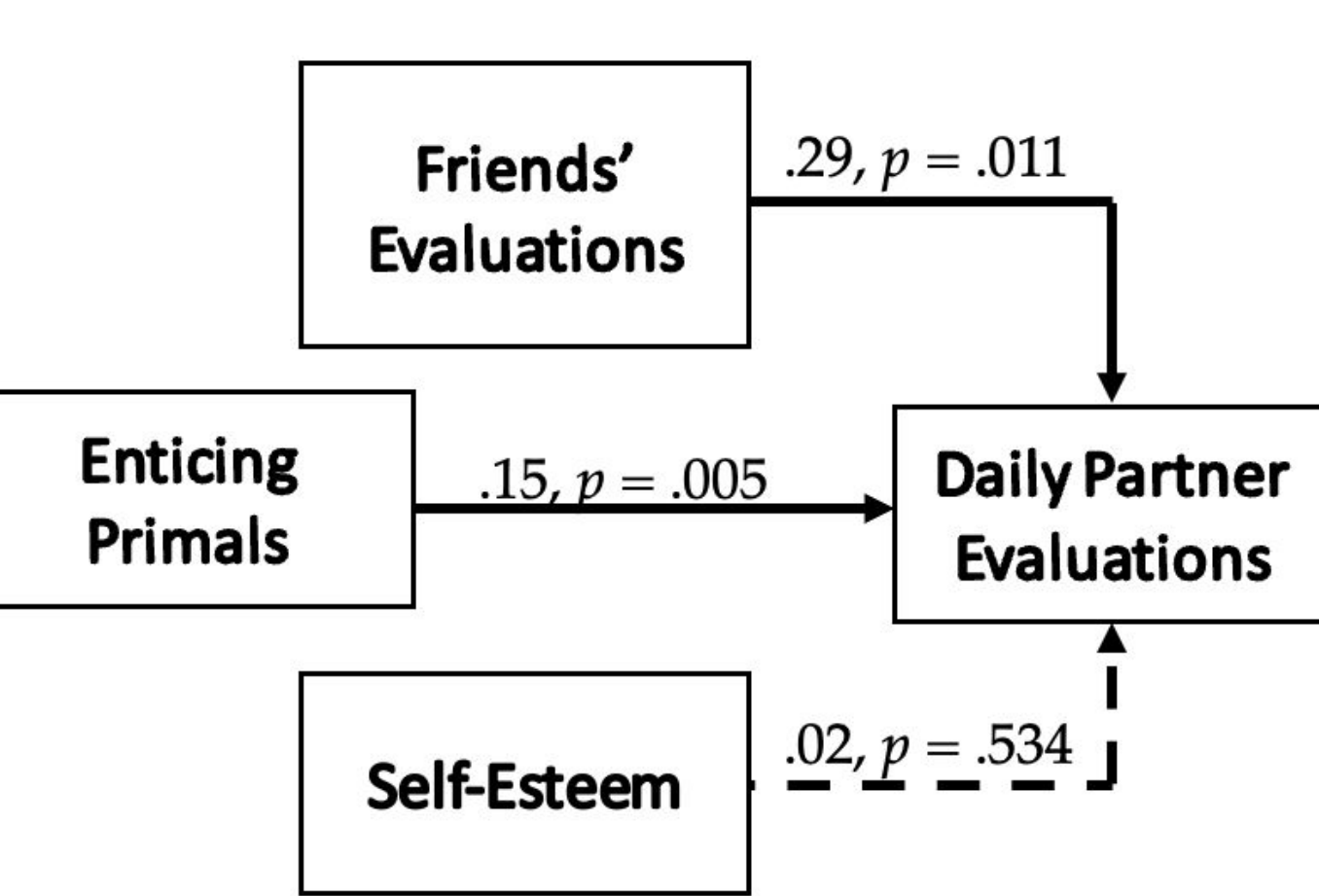
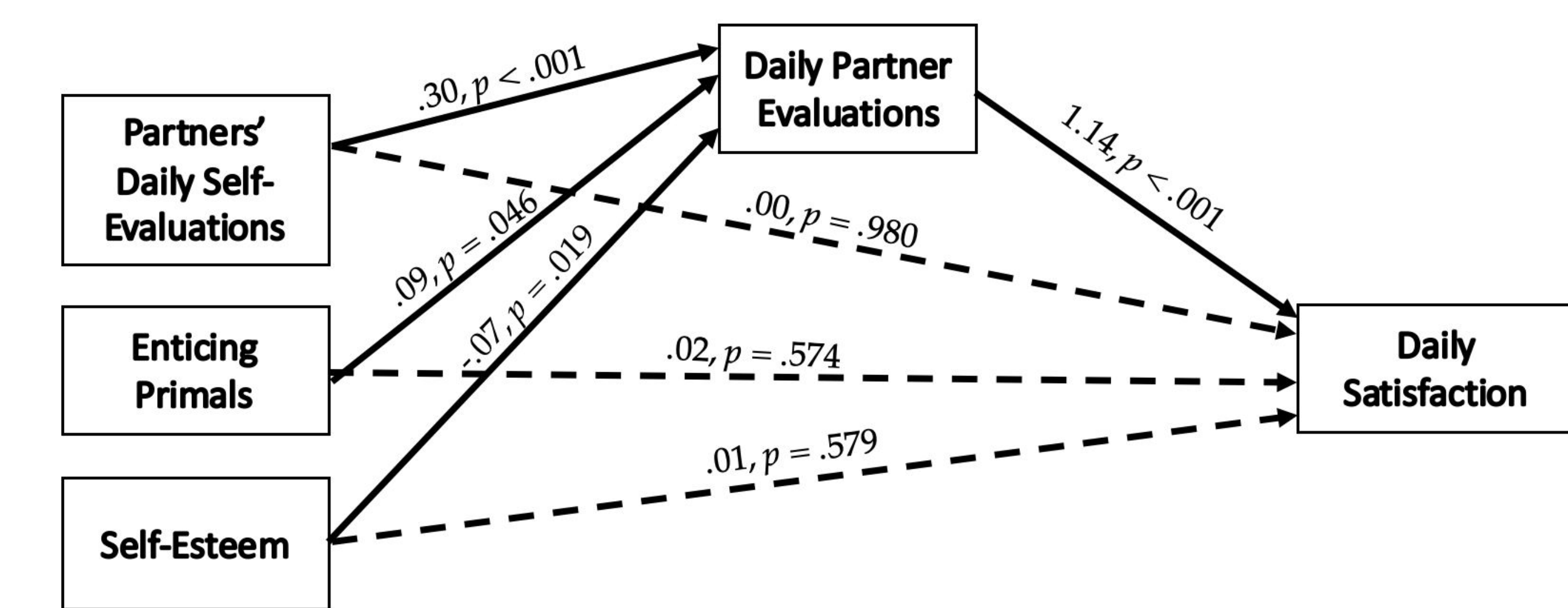


Figure 2. The Effect of Enticing Primals on Daily Partner Evaluations While Controlling for Self-Esteem and Friends’ Evaluations of Partners



Note. Coefficients are standardized.

Figure 3. The Mediating Role of Daily Partner Evaluations in the Effect of Enticing Primals on Daily Relationship Satisfaction.

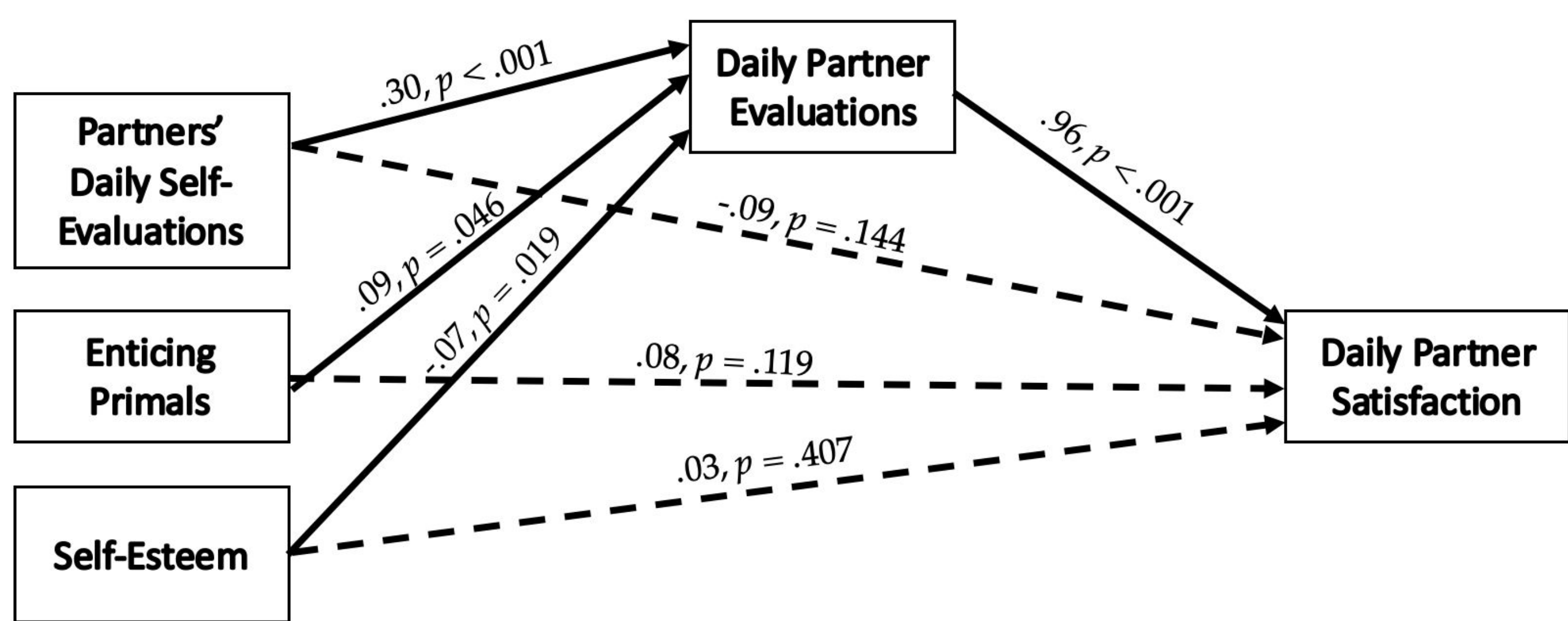


Note. Coefficients are standardized.

Enticing Primals → Daily Partner Evaluations → Daily Satisfaction
95% CL: .003, .20

Results Continued

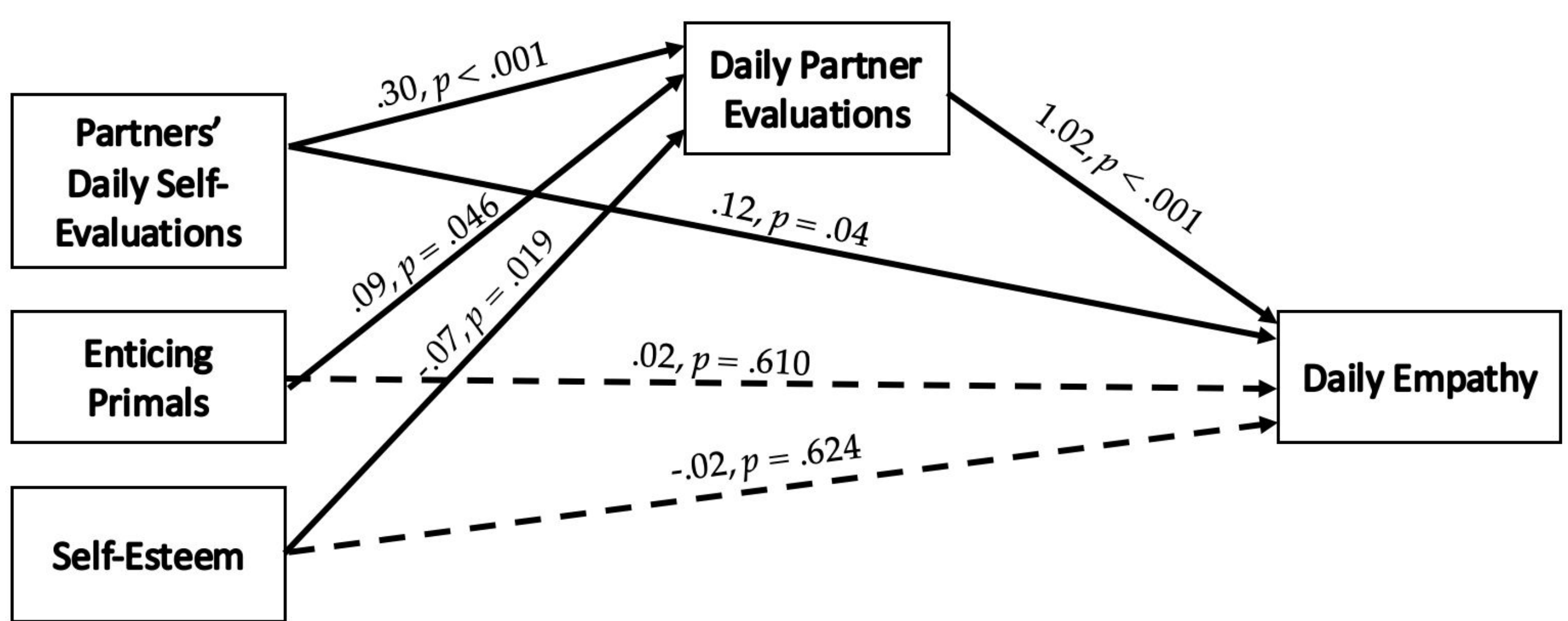
Figure 4. The Mediating Role of Daily Partner Evaluations in the Effect of Enticing Primals on Daily Partner Satisfaction



Note. Coefficients are standardized.

Enticing Primals → Daily Partner Evaluations → Daily Partner Satisfaction
95% CL: .001, .17

Figure 5. The Mediating Role of Daily Partner Evaluations in the Effect of Enticing Primals on Daily Empathy.



Note. Coefficients are standardized.

Enticing Primals → Daily Partner Evaluations → Daily Empathy
95% CL: .002, .18

Discussion

- Enticing primals predicted daily partner evaluations independently of partner’s evaluations and self-esteem. These results were not replicated with safe primals or alive primals.
- Enticing primals predicted daily partner evaluations independently of friends’ evaluations and self-esteem.
- In turn, partner evaluations mediated the effects of enticing primals on daily relationship satisfaction, daily partner relationship satisfaction, and daily empathy.
- These findings provide evidence for the inclusion of enticing primals as an additional predictor of positive illusions in romantic relationships.

Limitations & Future Directions

- Given that this study utilized self-report measures, impression management concerns may have impacted the accuracy of the daily partner evaluations even while controlling for partners’ daily self-evaluations and friends’ evaluations.
- Future research may benefit from an additional accuracy benchmark to ensure the presence of positive illusions. For example, an individual could rate their partner on traits such as “attractiveness” and then rate the average partner on the same traits.
- Theoretically, this study identified an additional predictor, enticing primals, of positive illusions. This identification is important for future intervention efforts centered around romantic relationship satisfaction and well-being.