The I in We: How Self-Esteem Impacts Romantic Relationships

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Alexis and Sam are in love. They still swoon when they look into each other's eyes. They got each other flowers for Valentine's Day. Alexis and Sam have known each other for seven years and are thinking about a long-term future together. They've even gone to look at wedding rings on a couple of occasions. But . . .

. . . There's just one thing . . . Despite her happiness in this relationship and all of Sam's great qualities, Alexis is worried about marriage because of Sam's self-esteem challenges. As a kid, Sam was bullied. And as a result of that, self-confidence is something that is hard for him. Sam sometimes struggles to feel he is important and contributes in meaningful ways. He has a poor body image, lots of self-doubts, and an anxious attachment style. Alexis is constantly reassuring him and taking care

of his emotional needs. She always wants to make sure he feels loved but she worries about how his self-esteem will affect their relationship long term. Will his "I" continue to affect their "We"? And what can he do to improve his self-esteem?

Self-esteem can impact many different parts of our life including mental health and relationship well-being. Sure, everyone struggles occasionally with how they feel about themselves, but chronic self-esteem issues can negatively affect our most cherished and important relationships.

Self-esteem issues have many causes. They can be caused by the way media portrays bodies. They can be caused by childhood trauma. And like in Sam's case, bullying can really do a number on self-esteem.

Whatever the cause, is there anything we can do to improve our self-esteem? To overcome some of these negative things, intentional actions can be taken. There are many things that can be done to increase self-esteem:

- Be aware of your thoughts about yourself; challenge negative thinking and self-doubt.
- Step back from your thoughts; externalize them (see them as coming from an external source, not your own mind).
- Use positive self-affirmations on a daily basis. Show yourself love.

- Avoid comparing yourself to others, including through social media.
- Get regular exercise and maintain a healthy diet.

So, Sam can take responsibility for his self-esteem. He can improve his relationship with Alexis by applying the principles from the list above. Sam can start each day affirming that Alexis loves him and that he has many positive attributes to contribute to their relationship. He can challenge his negative body image, be more kind to the reflection he sees in the mirror each morning. And he can stop comparing himself and his relationship to what he sees portrayed (often through false lenses) in the media.

Good news for Sam! These actions will help him be happier, healthier, and more able to contribute to his budding romance. Higher self-esteem is related to many different aspects of romantic relationships, includinghigher relationship quality, higher relationship satisfaction, and a more stable relationship. Maybe instead of window shopping those wedding rings, next time Sam and Alexis will buy one.

Makena Seal was the principal author of this blog.