

Summary of Ph.D. Thesis

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The title of the thesis: "A Bird in the Hand is Worth Two in the Bush": Rejection Sensitivity, Partner Selection Requirements, and Relationship Satisfaction

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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to examine whether and how fluctuations in rejection sensitivity—at the individual, situational, and natural levels—affect ideal partner standards, partner evaluations, and the discrepancies between them, as well as indirectly influence romantic relationship satisfaction, both in a static perspective and within the daily dynamics of a relationship. The theoretical foundations of the dissertation were organized into five complementary thematic areas. The first chapter focuses on partner selection processes, beginning with an analysis of reproductive strategies from an evolutionary perspective, which explains the biological and adaptive bases of partner preferences. Subsequently, the Ideal Standards Model was presented, explaining how people form expectations toward potential and actual partners and how these expectations influence relationship satisfaction. The chapter concludes with an analysis of predictors of ideal standards and partner evaluation, revealing factors that shape expectations and the perception of partners' actual characteristics. The second chapter is devoted to attachment theory and its significance for functioning in close romantic

relationships, showing how early experiences with caregivers shape patterns of expectations and behaviors in adult intimate relationships. The third chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of social rejection phenomena, beginning with a discussion of the fundamental need to belong and the consequences of its frustration. The mechanisms of social rejection, its effects on physical and psychological health, characteristic emotional reactions, and its impact on self-perception are presented. The fourth chapter introduces the key concept of rejection sensitivity, conceptualizing it as a defensive motivational system. Specific reactions to rejection characteristic of individuals with high rejection sensitivity and selected correlates of this personality trait are discussed. The fifth chapter integrates previous considerations, focusing on the specificity of functioning of rejection-sensitive individuals in the context of romantic relationships. It analyzes the relationships between experiencing rejection and relationship quality and presents theoretical foundations for potential associations between rejection sensitivity and ideal standards and partner evaluation. The theoretical considerations form a coherent foundation for empirical verification of research hypotheses that constitute the subject of the author's own research.

In the empirical section, four studies were presented. Study 1 (correlational) showed that higher rejection sensitivity is associated with elevated standards in the warmth dimension and greater discrepancies in warmth and vitality-status domains. Additionally, the study revealed a mediational mechanism in which the discrepancy between standards and partner evaluation partially explained the relationship between rejection sensitivity and reduced relationship satisfaction. The aim of Study 2 (experimental) was to examine the impact of repeated rejection experiences on rejection sensitivity levels and evaluation of potential partners. The study revealed that multiple rejection experiences led to decreased rejection sensitivity, particularly among individuals with high baseline levels of this trait. This effect was interpreted as adaptive emotional numbing protecting against further suffering. Simultaneously,

sensitized individuals negatively evaluated new potential partners, which may indicate the transfer of negative emotions. Study 3a was conducted among couples, analyzing relationships in longitudinal and dyadic terms. It was shown that in temporal perspective, rejection sensitivity leads to lowering standards toward partners, with gender differences – women lowered requirements regarding warmth and status, while men showed a broader pattern of expectation adjustment. The interpersonal nature of ideal standards was also revealed. Study 3b (diary study) analyzed daily changes in perceived rejection, discrepancies between standards and partner evaluation, and relationship satisfaction. The results confirmed that individuals with higher rejection sensitivity experience higher daily feelings of rejection. Moreover, a significant interaction between rejection sensitivity and perceived rejection was found: the relationship between rejection sensitivity and the discrepancy between standards and partner evaluation was stronger on days with lower (relative to individual mean) feelings of rejection, whereas on days with high feelings of rejection, an increase in discrepancy was observed across all individuals. The study also revealed complex temporal mechanisms – feelings of rejection decreased satisfaction on the same day but were associated with increased satisfaction the following day. In the final part of the work, the significance of the obtained results for romantic relationship theory was discussed, and it was emphasized that the interaction between individual rejection sensitivity and relational context is crucial for supporting stability and satisfaction in relationships.