

# When I think of you, I feel more confident about me: The relational self and self-confidence <sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Although much research has demonstrated the existence of relationship specific relational selves, the effects of those selves on feelings about the overall self-concept are unknown. The current research proposed that level of relational interdependent self-construal moderates the relationship between the activation of close relationship partners and self-confidence. The first study examined self-construal as a naturally occurring personality variable, whereas the second study manipulated self-construal. Both studies supported the hypothesis that those greater in relational interdependence experience greater self-confidence when close others are salient whereas those lower in relational interdependence experience lower self-confidence. The implications of the findings and linkages to past research are discussed.  
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## Introduction

Early theorizing, as well as contemporary empirical research on the self, has suggested that the self-concept is both multifaceted and malleable (e.g., James, 1890; Markus & Kunda, 1986). One of the most important influences on whom one is at any given time may be one's relationships with other people. As William James stated, "A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him" (1890). In other words, the working self-concept shifts as a function of relationship partners (Markus & Kunda, 1986). Although much research has supported the tendency for relationship partners to shift the working self-concept by activating a relationship specific self (i.e. a relational self) (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Baldwin, 1992; Fitzsimmons & Bargh, 2003; Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud,

2005; Shah, 2003), it is not clear whether the activation of relational selves is favorable or unfavorable for the overall self-concept. The current research broaches this topic by examining self-confidence as a consequence of relational self activation.

### *Relationship partners shift the self-concept*

Recently, a number of distinct lines of research have supported the hypothesis that relationship partners shift the self-concept. For example, the traits of close others can become directly linked to the self-concept when the close others are included in the self (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). When others are included in the self-concept, cognitive representations of the close others (including their various traits and attributes) are activated when representations of the self are activated. Thus, traits associated with the close others become linked to the self (Smith, Coats, & Walling, 1999). Therefore, married partners are quicker at making me/not me judgments for traits that are shared than for traits that one partner possesses and the other does not

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(Aron et al., 1991; Study 3). Along similar lines, individuals who fall in love experience increased diversity of self-concept domains and greater change in the self-concept, presumably because they incorporate aspects of the close other into the self (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). In summary, when relationship partners are included in the self, the self-concept shifts to include traits associated with the relationship partners.

Other research has indicated that relationship partners need not be as close to the self as romantic partners in order to shift the self-concept. Baldwin (1992) found that any familiar individual with whom one has a connection can activate a relational self which includes representations of what the self is like when with the other and/or how the other might view the self. Thus, the salience of wide-ranging relationship partners can activate relational selves. For example, in a study by Baldwin, Carrell, and Lopez (1990), psychology graduate students evaluated their own work as less impressive after being subliminally primed with the scowling face of their department chair (Baldwin et al., 1990; Study 1). Similarly, female Catholic participants who had read a sexual passage evaluated themselves less positively if they were primed with the Pope than if they were not (Baldwin et al., 1990; Study 2). Furthermore, this effect was only found for practicing Catholics, indicating that perceived significance of the primed other is an important component of the effects of priming others on the self-concept.

Anderson and colleagues have demonstrated that even strangers can shift the self-concept if one “transfers” characteristics of a recently or frequently activated close other onto the stranger (Andersen & Chen, 2002). A consequence of transference is that the stranger is perceived to be similar to the close other. For instance, Glassman and Andersen (1999) found that after being primed with a significant other, participants ascribed traits associated with that close other to an unknown target. More importantly, Andersen and colleagues demonstrated that transference can go beyond perceptions of another person to affect behavior toward that person. After being primed with a positively viewed significant other, participants were more likely to engage in a positive emotional exchange with a target person than if they had been previously primed with a negatively viewed significant other (Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996). Andersen and her colleagues also theorized that transference can affect views of the self. According to that perspective, knowledge about the self is linked to knowledge about significant others. Thus, when a relationship partner (or someone who resembles a relationship partner) is salient, a specific relational self is activated (Andersen & Chen, 2002).

Relationship partners can also trigger self-related goals and goal driven behavior that may then be pursued non-consciously (Fitzsimmons & Bargh, 2003). For example, participants were more likely to agree to help a stranger after being primed with a friend rather than a coworker (Fitzsimmons & Bargh, 2003). In a study by Shah (2003),

participants reported being more committed to a goal associated with a relationship partner after being primed with that relationship partner than after being primed with a control. Furthermore, participants actually worked harder on a task related to a goal associated with a relationship partner after being primed with that relationship partner (rather than with a control).

Finally, relationship partners can affect the self by functioning as social comparison standards (Festinger, 1954). For example, friends are frequently brought to mind spontaneously when evaluations of the self are made (Mussweiler & Ruter, 2003). One determinant of whether friends are contrasted or assimilated to the self is the attachment style of the perceiver (Gabriel et al., 2005). Individuals with avoidant attachment styles tend to compare friends with the self and become less similar to salient friends. Conversely, individuals with non-avoidant attachment styles tend to assimilate friends to the self and become more similar to salient friends. For example, after thinking about a smart friend, avoidant individuals do worse on an ostensible intelligence task whereas non-avoidant individuals do better (Gabriel et al., 2005; Study 3). Therefore, depending on one’s attachment style, relational selves which are either more or less similar to a salient friend are activated.

In summary, divergent lines of research support James’s hypothesis that relationship partners shift the self-concept. In other words, relational selves are activated when relationship partners are salient. One basic issue that has not been addressed is whether these relational selves are favorable or unfavorable for the self. Specifically, are individuals more or less self-confident when relational selves are activated? On the one hand, one could imagine that if the relational self pulls one away from one’s “true” self then it should decrease self-confidence. Consider the hypothetical case of Jane who, when asked what she is like, describes herself as primarily fun, funny, and laidback. However, when she is with her friend Lisa she feels smart (Gabriel et al., 2005), when she is with her mother she feels a desire to help others (Fitzsimmons & Bargh, 2003), and when she is with her advisor she feels studious (Baldwin et al., 1990). How can Jane ever feel as if she knows who she is and be self-confident when her relationship partners activate such disparate self-aspects? Indeed much research has suggested that people have a strong desire for self-consistency (e.g., Kelley, 1967; Mischel, 1998; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992), and high levels of consistency predict high levels of psychological well-being (Block, 1961; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). The importance of consistency suggests that activation of relational selves due to the salience of relationship partners might conceivably lead to a lack of self-confidence.

However, returning to the previous example, what if Jane was not troubled by the slight shifts in self-construal that relationship partners activated? Instead, what if Jane views her relational self (i.e. her self with others) as her “true” self? When asked what she is like, this Jane

describes herself as primarily a daughter, friend, and advisee. Thus, thinking of her mom or her friend or her advisor would not decrease her self-confidence, but instead increase it. Individuals who view their relational selves as central to their senses of self are high in relational interdependent self-construal (RISC) (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Individuals high in RISC are more likely to organize self-cognitions in relational terms (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002) and endorse statements such as “When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also,” and “my close relationships are an important part of my self-image.” Thus, people high in RISC tend to define themselves by means of their relationships and see their genuine self as including relationship partners. In addition, self-consistency is not related to psychological well-being for individuals high in RISC (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003), suggesting that such people are comfortable with a socially shifting self. Because individuals high in RISC are not troubled by inconsistency and perceive their genuine selves as including relationship partners, we predict that salient relationship partners will increase the self-confidence of individuals high in RISC. Low RISC individuals, however, do not define themselves by relationships. Instead, they expect a stable sense of self and have lower psychological well-being when they are low in self-consistency (Cross et al., 2003). Therefore we predict that, for low RISC individuals, salient relationship partners should not increase, and may even decrease, self-confidence.

### The current research

The current research explores the extent to which activating specific relationships affects feelings of self-confidence, and whether this influence is moderated by relational interdependent self-construal (RISC). Because those higher in RISC define themselves in terms of their relationships with close others, we predicted that high levels of RISC should be associated with high levels of self-confidence and low levels of RISC should be associated with lower levels of self-confidence after exposure to a relationship partner. Two studies examine this hypothesis. The first study did so by measuring self-construal, whereas the second study manipulated self-construal by priming interdependence versus independence.

## Study 1

### Overview

Under the guise of an experiment on social perception, participants completed the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale. They were then primed with either a close friend or the television celebrity Regis Philbin (a control), followed by items aimed at assessing their self-confidence. It was predicted that RISC would moderate the effects of salient friends on self-confidence.

### Method

#### Participants and design

Participants were 148 (122 females and 26 males) undergraduates at Michigan State University who received research credit for their participation. The average age of participants was 19. The experiment employed a 2 (Relational Interdependent Self-Construal: Low versus High)  $\times$  2 (Relationship Salience: Friend versus Control) between-subjects design.

#### Materials and procedure

Working on computers in private cubicles, participants first completed the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale developed by Cross et al. (2000) to assess the extent to which they define themselves in terms of their close friendships. The scale consisted of 10 items to be rated using a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Items were summed and scored such that higher scores reflected higher relational interdependent self-construal. Scale reliability was strong, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ . Following this, half of the participants were primed with a good friend. Those participants spent 8 min describing the good friend, whereas those in the control condition spent 8 min writing about the television personality Regis Philbin.<sup>1</sup>

*Self-confidence.* After the writing task, participants responded to three items intended to assess self-confidence on a scale that ranged from 1 (do not agree at all) to 7 (strongly agree). The items were “Right now, I feel like I really know who I am,” “Right now, I feel very confident about who I am,” and “Right now, I feel very comfortable with who I am.” A composite of self-confidence was created by summing and taking the mean of the three items. The composite showed strong reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.87$ .<sup>2</sup>

### Results and discussion

We hypothesized that level of RISC would interact with condition to predict self-confidence. To test that hypothesis, RISC scores were centered and a regression was run in

<sup>1</sup> Regis Philbin was a very well-known celebrity at the time these studies were run. He was hosting a popular prime-time game show called “Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?” in addition to a daytime talk show. A pretest determined that most students were familiar with Regis Philbin but did not have strong feelings about him.

<sup>2</sup> Three studies examined the validity of the self-confidence measure. First, utilizing a sample of 179 undergraduates, the first study found that the scale had a high reliability  $\alpha = 0.85$  and was related to, but distinct from, state self-esteem  $r = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (as measured by a modified version of the Rosenberg, 1965 scale), positive affect  $r = 0.39$ ;  $p < 0.001$ , and negative affect  $r = -0.41$ ;  $p < 0.001$  (both measured with the PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). A second sample of 136 undergraduates found that the scale was related to, but distinct from, the performance  $r = 0.30$ ;  $p < 0.001$  and social  $r = 0.57$ ;  $p < 0.001$  subscales of Heatherton and Polivy (1991) (s) State Self-Esteem Scale. Finally, the third study examined whether the scale predicted self-confident behavior. As hypothesized, among 188 undergraduates, self-confidence scores were negatively correlated with the amount of time required to think of 10 self-descriptive traits  $r = -0.24$ ;  $p = 0.008$ .

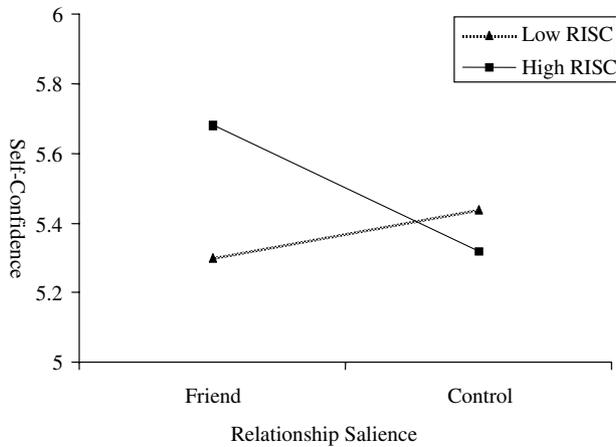


Fig. 1. Interaction between relational interdependent self-construal and relationship salience in Study 1.

which self-confidence was regressed onto (a) centered level of RISC, (b) Relationship Salience, and (c) the interaction of centered level of RISC and condition. Neither of the main effects was significant ( $ps > 0.5$ ), but the interaction of RISC and condition was significant  $\beta = 0.198$ ,  $p = 0.02$ , (see Fig. 1 based on predicted means at one standard deviation above and below the total sample mean for RISC). Simple slope analysis revealed that individuals high in RISC (one standard deviation above the mean) were more self-confident after being primed with a friend than in the control  $\beta = 0.249$ ,  $p = 0.03$ . However, individuals low in RISC did not differ in self-confidence based on condition  $p = 0.20$ . Thus, when those high in RISC thought of a relationship partner, they felt a heightened sense of self-confidence as compared to those who were not thinking about a relationship partner. Individuals low in RISC did not show the same effects. In summary, the results support the hypothesis that the relation between salient relationship partners and self-confidence varies as a function of RISC.<sup>3</sup>

Study 1 examined RISC as a naturally occurring personality variable. Thus, it is difficult to be confident that RISC and not another, unmeasured variable was responsible for the results. For example, individuals high in RISC may have different kinds of friendships than those low in RISC and the differences in friendship type might drive the differences in self-confidence (Cross et al., 2002). Study 2 addressed this issue by priming level of relational interdependent self-construal. Although there are individual differences in the degree to which individuals emphasize the relational interdependent self-construal, all individuals possess some degree of relational interdependent self-construal (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Priming the relational interdependent aspects of self can lead all individuals to temporarily react like individuals

who are chronically high in relational interdependence (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999, 2002). Thus, Study 2 primed participants to activate either the relational interdependent or independent aspects of self. If participants primed with relational interdependence behave similarly to participants who are dispositionally higher in relational interdependence, we can be more confident that it is indeed relational interdependence that moderates the effects of relationship partners on the self. In addition, if relational interdependence can be primed in this way, then this would indicate that all people can potentially benefit by the salience of relationship partners under specific circumstances (i.e., under conditions that activate the relational interdependent aspects of self).

## Study 2

### Overview

Study 2 followed the same procedure as Study 1 except that independence or relational interdependence was primed before the relationship salience manipulation. However, to control for individual differences in RISC, this was measured and statistically controlled. We expected results to be similar to those of Study 1. Participants primed with relational interdependence should report greater self-confidence after being primed with a friend than after being primed with a control. Conversely, participants primed to construe the self as independent would report less self-confidence after then being primed with a friend than after being primed with a control.

In addition, a main effect of independence is possible. Specifically, participants primed with independence may be higher in self-confidence than those primed with interdependence because of the strong relationship between independence and constructs strongly correlated with self-confidence (see Footnote 2). For example, an independent self-construal is related to high self-esteem (Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001) and more self-promotion (Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000). Therefore, in addition to the predicted interaction, independence priming may lead to higher self-confidence overall.<sup>4</sup>

### Method

#### Participants and design

Participants included 232 (146 females and 86 males) undergraduate students at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The average age of participants was 20. The design of this study was a 2 (Prime: interdependence versus independence)  $\times$  2 (Condition: friend versus control) between-subjects design.

<sup>3</sup> Past research has suggested that women are higher in RISC than men (Cross & Madson, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Women were marginally higher in RISC (5.74) than men (5.36)  $t(146) = 1.72$ ;  $p = 0.09$ . The low number of male participants in the current sample made any further examination difficult.

<sup>4</sup> A similar main effect was not expected in Study 1 because independence was not manipulated or measured. Relational interdependence and independence are orthogonal constructs (e.g. Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Thus, being low in relational interdependence does not necessitate being high in independence.

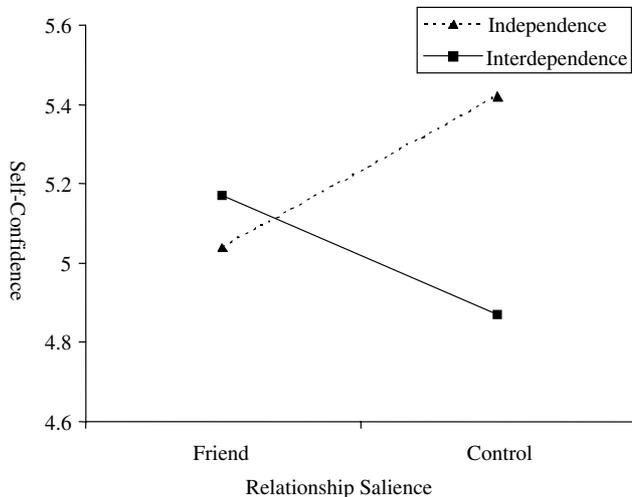


Fig. 2. Interaction between primed relational interdependent self-construal and relationship salience in Study 2.

### Materials and procedure

The procedure for this study was similar to that of Study 1, except that after completing the RISC scale and immediately prior to writing their essay, participants read a story designed to activate either an independent or a relational interdependent self-construal (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Specifically, participants read a story about a general who had to choose a warrior to send to the king. In the independent condition, the general chose a candidate who would reflect best on him and thus benefit him individually. In the interdependent condition, the general chose a member of his own family, and thus benefited his family. The two versions of the story have been found to activate independent versus relational interdependent aspects of self (Gardner et al., 1999; Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002; Trafimow et al., 1991). After reading the story, participants wrote an essay about a close friend or about Regis Philbin for 8 min and responded to the three self-confidence items from Study 1.

### Results and discussion

As in Study 1, the three self-confidence items were combined to form one measure of self-confidence ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ). A 2 (Prime: Independent versus Interdependent)  $\times$  2 (Relationship Salience: Friend versus Control) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted on the self-confidence composite with RISC as a covariate. A main effect for prime was found,  $F(1, 231) = 4.07, p < 0.05$ . Those who were primed with independence reported greater self-confidence ( $M = 5.22, SD = 1.31$ ) than did those primed with relational interdependence ( $M = 5.01, SD = 1.36$ ). This is not surprising given the previously discussed relationship between independence and measures related to self-confidence. The main effect was qualified by an interaction between prime and condition,  $F(1, 231) = 6.48, p < 0.05$  (see Fig. 2). Participants primed with RISC were more self-confident in the

friend condition than in the control condition  $t = 2.22; p < 0.05$ . Conversely, participants primed with independence demonstrated a trend in the opposite direction; participants in the friend condition were marginally less self-confident than those in the control condition  $t = 1.60; p = 0.10$ . Thus, priming relational interdependence led participants to be more self-confident when thinking of a social relationship as compared to when not thinking of social relationships. In summary, the effects of RISC as a naturally occurring variable (Study 1) and priming RISC (Study 2) on self-confidence are remarkably similar. The only notable difference is the main effect of independence on self-confidence found in the priming study.<sup>5</sup>

We also attempted to replicate the results of Study 1 by running a regression to examine the effects of trait RISC and relationship salience on self-confidence. Replicating Study 1, the interaction of RISC and relationship salience was significant,  $\beta = 0.143, p = 0.03$ . Although the planned comparisons were not significant, the patterns of participants high and low in RISC were similar to Study 1. Specifically, individuals high in RISC were more self-confident after being primed with a friend,  $\beta = 0.123, p = 0.11$ , whereas individuals low in RISC were less self-confident after being primed with a friend,  $\beta = -0.123, p = 0.17$ .

### Meta-analysis of studies 1 and 2

Both Studies 1 and 2 measured levels of RISC, primed participants with a friend or control, and then measured self-confidence using the same three-item measure. Therefore, the data from Studies 1 and 2 were combined to examine the effects of level of RISC and relationship prime on self-confidence. There was a main effect for RISC,  $\beta = 0.223; p < 0.001$ , indicating that participants high in RISC were higher in self-confidence. However, that main effect was qualified by a significant interaction of RISC and relationship prime,  $\beta = 0.175; p < 0.001$ . Participants low in RISC were less self-confident after being primed with a friend as compared to a control,  $\beta = 0.157; p = 0.02$ . Conversely, participants high in RISC were more self-confident after being primed with a friend as compared to a control,  $\beta = 0.156; p = 0.01$ . Thus, combining the data from Studies

<sup>5</sup> In Study 2, there was not a significant gender difference in RISC ( $p = 0.13$ ), although the means were in the predicted direction (5.32 for men vs. 5.57 for women). When gender was entered as a third factor into the ANCOVA, there was no main effect ( $p = 0.97$ ), the interaction between independence priming and relationship salience was still significant, and the 3-way interaction was not significant ( $p = 0.72$ ). Thus, gender differences did not account for the effects of relationship salience and relational interdependence on self-confidence. However, there was a marginally significant interaction between gender and interdependence priming  $F(1, 223) = 3.52; p = 0.06$ . Women were more susceptible to the primes (5.4 in the independent versus 4.8 in the interdependent conditions) than men (5.1 in the independent versus 5.2 in the interdependent conditions). This is consistent with other work demonstrating that individuals who live in independent cultures (e.g. the United States) but belong to a subgroup that tends to be more interdependent (e.g. women or Asians) are more susceptible to interdependence priming (Gardner, Gabriel, & Dean, 2004).

1 and 2 provides additional power to view the interaction of RISC and salience of friends on self-confidence and indicates that individuals low in RISC are less self-confident when they think of a friend, whereas individuals high in RISC are more self-confident when thinking of a friend.

### General discussion

Two studies supported the hypothesis that whether the activation of relationship partners increases or decreases self-confidence depends on relational interdependence. Study 1 demonstrated that when a close other is active, those higher in RISC report higher self-confidence than those low in RISC, as revealed by believing that they know who they are, are confident about who they are, and are comfortable with themselves. Study 2 directly examined the effects of salient others and self-construal on self-confidence by experimentally manipulating relational interdependent self-construal. As predicted, participants primed to be high in RISC became more self-confident when a friend was primed. Thus, for those greater in RISC, the social self appears to be the self they feel most confident about.

Individuals low in RISC reacted to salient friends by becoming relatively less self-confident. Although there was not sufficient power in Study 1 to illuminate this effect, a meta-analysis of Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated that individuals low in RISC became less self-confident when salient friends were activated. In addition, Study 2 suggested that priming independence led participants to become marginally less self-confident when friends were salient as compared to when they were not. Thus, because they do not define the self via relationships and desire self-consistency (Cross et al., 2002), individuals low in RISC tend to be less confident about whom they are when thinking about friends.

The current studies increase our understanding of the relational interdependent self-construal by suggesting that RISC not only moderates the effects of relationship partners on organization of the self-concept (Cross et al., 2002) and behavior towards others (Cross & Morris, 2003), it also moderates the effects of relationship partners on feelings about the self. Researchers have argued that individuals with a relational self-construal consider their relational selves to be their “true” selves (Cross et al., 2000, 2003). However, until now, there has been little direct empirical evidence supporting that assertion. By demonstrating that social relationships increase the self-confidence of high RISC individuals, the current studies are consistent with the hypothesis that individuals high in RISC perceive their relational selves as their “true” selves. However, it should be noted that the current studies did not directly examine whether self-confidence increased because a “true” self was activated. It is possible that RISC moderated the effects of friends on the self via another mechanism. For example, perhaps differences in the types of friendships formed by high and low RISC individuals may have led to differences in self-confidence (Cross et al., 2000). In addition, thinking about friends might have self-affirmation benefits for indi-

viduals high in RISC (Steele, 1998).<sup>6</sup> Although both of those explanations have some limitations (e.g. the former would not explain the priming difference found in Study 2 and the latter would not explain why low RISC participants had higher self-confidence after thinking about Regis Philbin), future research is necessary to determine the precise underlying mechanism.

Perhaps individuals from Eastern cultures would demonstrate similar effects to those shown by our high RISC participants. Individuals from Eastern cultures are more likely to define themselves in the context of social relationships and situations (Cousins, 1989). In other words, when asked about themselves, rather than describing a consistent self, they are more likely to define a series of selves with specific relationship partners or in certain social roles. Given the higher levels of interdependence generally found in Eastern populations and their tendency to describe themselves using social relationships, it stands to reason that Eastern people would become more self-confident when thinking about social relationships. Future research will be necessary to examine that possibility.

The current research also increases our understanding of how relationships can benefit individuals by demonstrating that relationship partners can make some individuals feel more self-confident. Therefore, for those greater in RISC, spending time with close others may ultimately lead to higher self-esteem. As shown in Study 2, even those with a natural tendency toward independence can benefit from friends if currently thinking in an interdependent fashion. Thus, friendships can provide a boost to the self-concept. The current research may also elucidate one reason why some people shy away from intimate relationships. The propensity of relationship partners to decrease the self-confidence of individuals low in RISC may lead them to avoid close relationships as a means of protecting the self. Future research would be necessary to examine that hypothesis.

What would happen to self-confidence if a relationship partner activated negative self-aspects? Although the generally positive nature of close relationships suggests that much of what is activated about the self in the presence of close relationship partners should be positive (Gabriel et al., 2005), there may be times when negative information about the self may be activated as well (Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Bloor, 2004). For example, Baldwin et al. (1990) found that graduate students became more critical of their own achievements when primed with the scowling face of their department chair. Thus, relationship partners who activate negative information about the self may provide an exception to the current findings; if a close other activates negative information about the self, even individuals high in relational self-construal may become less self-confident when in their presence. Future research would be necessary to examine that possibility.

<sup>6</sup> We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out these interesting possibilities.

Finally, the current research provides an initial examination of whether the social nature of the self is generally positive or negative. When William James argued that, “a man has as many social selves as he does relationships,” he did not specify whether that large number of social selves was helpful or harmful. The current research suggests that it depends on the orientation of the individual; relational selves are positive for people who are high in relational self-construal but potentially troubling for those who are low in relational self-construal. Given the growing body of research indicating the tremendous social flexibility of the self, the current research provides an important first step in addressing when close relationship partners make people feel better or worse about the self.

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