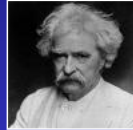


Our glories, our shames: Expanding the self in temporal self appraisal theory

Sara H. Konrath, University of Michigan

Michael Ross, University of Waterloo

"There's always something about your success that displeases even your best friends." ~Mark Twain



Upward Social Comparisons:

- *Research by Tesser et al (1988) has confirmed Twain's cynicism: people are threatened by the successes of close others
- *Recent research extends these findings: e.g. Gardner et al (2002) discovered that participants primed with interdependence were no longer threatened by a close other's success
- *They theorize that "if the self expands to include close others, then their successes, even in self-relevant domains should boost esteem rather than threaten it."
- *We believe that if the self expands to include close others, then *both their failures and their successes* should influence the self

Temporal Self Comparisons:

- *Ross & Wilson (2002) believe that people treat 'past selves' as comparison targets with their 'current selves'
- *People try to maximize past successes by seeing these successes as happening recently and thus representative of their current self
- *People also try to minimize past failures by seeing them as happening in the distant past and thus not representative of their current self
- *Thus, a personal success feels closer in subjective time than a personal failure that occurred at about the same (real) time

Current Study:

- *We wondered what would happen if we studied people who included close others in their self-concepts (Aron et al, 1991)
- *Would these people use the mechanism of psychological distancing to protect themselves from their partner's failures and/or boost themselves with their partner's successes?

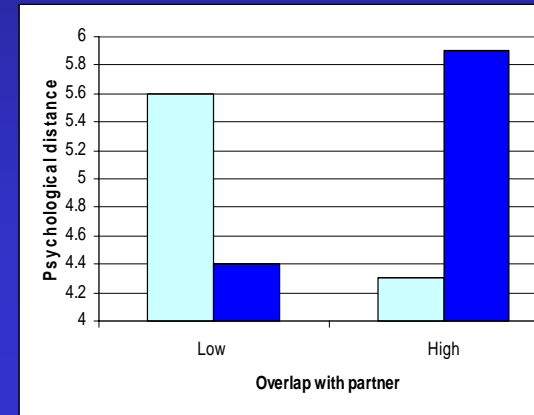
Method:

- *We asked people in long-term romantic relationships to describe a proud (positive) or embarrassing (negative) incident that happened to their partner
- *We then asked them how far away the incident felt to them (1=feels like yesterday, 10=feels very far away)
- *We assessed overlap by conducting a median split on Aron et al.'s (1991) IOS scale. We controlled for actual time that events occurred.

Results:

- *Past research (Ross & Wilson, 2002) has found that successes feel closer away in psychological time than failures, but only if the event happened to the self (not an acquaintance)
- *Despite this, we found an Overlap X Valence interaction, $F(1,38)=5.602, p=.023$
- *Participants who were highly overlapped with their partners perceived their partner's failures as more distant than their partner's successes ($p=.049$)
- *A non-significant trend in the opposite direction was found for low overlap participants ($p=.198$)

Asymmetrical psychological distancing of partner failures



Caveats & Conclusions:

- *We have no direct evidence that high overlap participants felt personal threat: maybe they distance the failures to protect their partner from failure or to protect self
- *As well, it is unclear whether the effects are driven by the negative or the positive partner event. Participants may be distancing partner failures forward, partner successes backward, or both.
- *What we do know is that when the self expands to include close others, the self responds to the outcomes as they might respond to their own outcomes
- *We are currently devising methods of randomly assigning levels of psychological overlap with close others and will continue to study these effects

For more information, contact: skonrath@uwaterloo.ca