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## The Influence of the Self in Partner Behavior Interpretation

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### *Abstract*

*This study examined how aspects of the self (i.e. self-concept clarity, self-expansion, and inclusion of the other in the self) influence relationship attributions. A sample of 92 (20 males, 72 females) college students in a relationship received a series of surveys assessing their levels of self-concept clarity, self-expansion, and inclusion of the other in the self. Additionally, they completed a survey assessing whether they make relationship enhancing attributions when interpreting behavior. Self-expansion and inclusion of the other in the self positively correlated with relationship enhancing attributions. However, there was no significant relationship between self-concept clarity and relationship enhancing attributions. Regression analyses revealed that self-expansion was more important for making relationship enhancing attributions than inclusion of the other in the self. Overall, results suggest that those high on self-expansion and inclusion of the other in the self will make attributions that enhance their relationship.*

*Keywords: self-expansion, closeness, self-concept clarity, behavior, attributions*

Think about the following scenario- An individual comes home from a long day at work and waiting for him is his favorite meal prepared from scratch by his significant other. Undoubtedly this is a kind gesture; but why did his partner do this for him? It could be that this type of positive behavior is a sign of his partner being a good person who routinely does nice things for him. Conversely, this gesture could be a rare but clever ploy designed to compensate for a wrongdoing committed against him. In each case the individual is making an attribution, or an interpretation, that helps to label and explain the partner's behavior (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Although there are many different ways in which to make attributions, some are more likely to positively influence relationships. If attributions can help enhance a relationship, understanding what makes these types of attributions is important. The present research explores this possibility by studying how aspects of the self influence relationship attributions.

### **Dispositional and Situational Attributions**

There are two general ways to explain a person's behavior: dispositional or situational attributions (Ross, 1977). A dispositional attribution involves interpreting a person's behavior as due to that individual's character, personality, or who she or he is as a person. Contrarily, a situational attribution involves interpreting a person's behavior as due to external forces, the environment, or the surrounding context. To explicate, if a friend offers to drive to the airport and the behavior is interpreted as due to the friend's character, feeling that he/she is a good person, then a dispositional attribution is made; while if this behavior is interpreted as a result of outside influences, maybe it is owed by the friend since they've been driven before and they have to go in that direction anyway, then a situational attribution is made.

Generally, when interpreting others' behavior an observer tends to overemphasize the influence of dispositional factors, a

phenomenon known as the fundamental attribution error (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). Similarly, the actor-observer bias shows that when making an attribution for one's own behavior, especially negative behavior, a person is more likely to account for situational factors (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). Consistent with this, the self-serving bias demonstrates that a person is more likely to account for dispositional factors when making an attribution for their own positive behavior (Miller & Ross, 1975). As an illustration, participants making attributions about the self consistently felt that positive behavior was due to personal characteristics, while negative behavior was due to situational factors (van der Pligt & Eiser, 1983).

Notably, participants make dispositional or situational attributions depending on who engages in the behavior and whether that behavior is good or bad. These attribution tendencies help to understand human behavior, particularly in terms of how people think about themselves juxtaposed with how they think of others. Though dispositional and situational attributions are the most basic distinction, there are additional facets to understand behavior.

### **Global, Stable, and Specific Attributions**

Attributions can fall into many categories. In addition to determining whether the person or the situation is responsible for a behavior, perceptions of behavior frequency are also important. A global attribution, for instance, involves interpreting a behavior as repetitive, one that happens all the time (Heider, 1958) or one that is widespread and affects multiple areas (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). If a mother perceives that her child always forgets to close the door or that the child routinely fails to close things in other contexts (e.g.,

windows, cereal, boxes, drawers) she would be making a global attribution. In opposition, the specific attribution involves interpreting a behavior as infrequent, only occurring in one instance, or confined to just one area.

Attributions can also account for whether a person interprets behavior as stable or not. In this case, the stable attribution involves seeing behavior as likely to stay the same (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Thus, if the mother interprets the failure to close the door as an expected behavior that is likely to occur again in the future, she would be making a stable attribution. While, if the mother perceived that the behavior would be likely to change, she would consider it not stable. Markedly, attributions influence thinking and may change depending on who they are applied to.

### **Attributions of Close Others**

In the context of a romantic relationship, many attributions focus on understanding and interpreting partner's behavior. It is unclear though how the heightened closeness in a romantic relationship will affect attributions. On one hand, since a romantic partner is the object of the attribution instead of the self, he or she may receive similar treatment like that of any other person (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). On the other hand, since the object of the attribution is a particularly close other, they may receive special attributional treatment. In fact, there is even evidence that participants project the self-serving bias onto close partners (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). Researchers gave participants a task to accomplish together. However in some pairings researchers experimentally induced closeness between participants, while others were left unmodified. Researchers discovered that those who felt closer to their study partner did not perceive failure of a task as a result of

their own doing, or that of their close counterpart, yet success was perceived as such. Seemingly, closeness can evoke a special case of “others” that cause a shift in attributions.

### **Relationship Enhancing Attributions**

Romantic partners, who are particularly close “others,” should benefit from behavior interpretations and attributions that are even more positively skewed. An attributional style where an individual interprets another’s behavior positively is particularly beneficial for thinking about a romantic partner in the best possible light. These types of relationship enhancing attributions involve viewing a partner’s positive behavior as dispositional, occurring in a variety of contexts, and consistent (Brehm & Kassin, 1990). In contrast, for a partner’s negative behavior it is viewed as situational, confined to just one context, and inconsistent.

Relationship-enhancing attributions play a significant role in relationships. Research finds that women who use them are happier in their partnership (Malinen, Tolvanen & Rönkä, 2012). In general, changes in attributions influence marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2000), such that those who view their partner’s behavior negatively tend to have lower relationship satisfaction (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 2000). Further, attributions predict later behavior which in turn also influences marital quality for both spouses (Durtschi, Fincham, Cui, Lorenz & Conger, 2011). Specifically, not making global attributions towards negative behavior is associated with higher levels of satisfaction (McNulty, O’Mara, & Karney, 2008).

Predictably, spouses can even improve on their happy marriages by just thinking better of their partner, or rather in a way that enhances the relationship. Thus, these

relationship-enhancing attributions that bolster a relationship ultimately may help keep partners together (Malinen et al., 2012; McNulty et al., 2008). Given the importance of relationship-enhancing attributions for improving and maintaining relationships, it is essential to identify constructs that may encourage greater use of relationship-enhancing attributions.

### **Inclusion of Other in the Self**

An individual’s self-concept typically plays a large role in relationships (Hinde, Finkenauer, & Auhagen, 2001). Moreover, constructs focusing on the role of the self are likely to influence relationship attributions. Research has established that closeness influences attributions (Sedikides et al., 1998), but romantic relationships involve a combination of behavioral (physically being near the partner) and cognitive closeness (feeling close), with cognitive closeness closely tied to the self-concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Inclusion of other in the self is a construct that captures both the behavioral and cognitive elements of closeness particularly well by focusing on how much one partner’s sense of self overlaps with the other partner’s sense of self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). In other words, those with greater inclusion of their partner in the self spend more time together and feel interconnected to the extent where partners have a hard time distinguishing between their own self and their partner (Mashek, Aron, & Boncimino, 2003).

Consequently, through spending time with a partner and perceiving the sense of self overlapping to a greater degree, it may feel like a partner’s characteristics are one’s own (Aron et al., 1991). A partner for example may be a great athlete and their significant other (although never typically skillful in any sport) begins to think that he or she is a great

athlete; in this the significant other adds their partner's qualities to their own self-concept. In this situation the significant other is thinking of their partner as a part of themselves and when interpreting their partner's behavior they may be more likely to use the favorable attributions they give to their own self (Jones & Nisbett, 1971; Miller & Ross, 1975).

### **Self-expansion**

The primary outcome of inclusion of the other in the self is self-expansion, or how much the self-concept increases or one grows as a person (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Lewandowski, Mashek, & Aron, 2013). Couples can self-expand through engaging in novel, interesting, and challenging activities together. An experience such as skydiving, for example, may just be the type of new, interesting, and challenging activity that couples could do to enhance one another. In fact, when a person falls in love, there is a literal expansion of the self that results in the self-concept growing (Aron, Paris & Aron, 1995). This growth is assuredly advantageous, as couples who do self-expanding activities together report higher quality relationships (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). Likewise, those who report more self-expanding in their relationship, also report a lower likelihood of cheating (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006) and are less likely to pay attention to alternative partners (Vanderdrift, Lewandowski, & Agnew, 2011). When a relationship provides benefits resulting from self-expansion, a partner likely becomes associated with those benefits. Conceivably then, when given the opportunity to interpret a partner's behavior one may be more likely to make a relationship enhancing attribution.

### **Self-Concept Clarity**

As new aspects are included in the self, leading the self to expand, the self inevitably changes. It is unclear though how these changes influence self-perception. This new addition may help either gain more certainty about who one is, or it could cloud perceptions. That is, an individual's self-concept clarity, or how clear someone is on who they are and how consistent they remain on their understanding of the self, may change (Campbell, 1986; Setterlund & Niedenthal, 1993). Greater self-concept clarity has benefits for the individual, specifically in terms of increasing consistency in behavior (Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavallee, & Lehman, 1996). Additionally, those with higher self-concept clarity are also more content in their relationship and more committed (Lewandowski, Nardone, & Raines, 2010). Presumably then, those with a high self-concept may want to use relationship enhancing attributions in order to maintain their level of happiness and commitment in their relationship.

Given these benefits of self-concept clarity, it is likely that having a clearer and more well-defined sense of self could influence how a person interprets their partner's behavior. In particular, because those with high self-concept clarity can better predict their own future behavior (Lewandowski & Nardone, 2012), it may provide greater insight into other's behavior; whereas those who do not have a clear view of who they really are may have difficulty interpreting their partner's behavior (Campbell et al., 1996). It is possible then that high self-concept clarity may also lead to more accurate predictions of partner's behavior and in turn more precise attributions. As follows, if those with a high self-concept are more content in their

relationship, they probably regularly understand their partner's behavior in a favorable way.

### The Present Study

Previous research has looked at the self in terms of self-concept clarity, inclusion of the other in the self and self-expansion and how they relate to one another (Aron et al., 1992; Aron et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 1996). Additionally, previous research has also investigated the nature of relationship attributions (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; Fincham et al., 2000; Kühnen, Hannover, Pöhlmann & Roeder, 2013). However, research has yet to see how self-concept clarity, inclusion of the other in the self, and self-expansion altogether influence relationship attributions. Therefore, the current study hopes to use previous research in order to further investigate this concept that has yet to be explored. Through examination of these constructs, the present study aims to offer a deeper understanding of how aspects of the self play a role in partner behavior interpretation.

- 1) It is hypothesized that those who are high in self-concept clarity, as opposed to those who are low in self-concept clarity, will make relationship enhancing attributions. Those with high self-concept clarity are more content and committed in their relationships (Lewandowski et al., 2010). In order to maintain their relationship quality those with a higher self-concept will probably make attributions that enhance the relationship.
- 2) Those who are highly included with their partner, as opposed to those who are lowly included with their partner, will make relationship enhancing attributions. Those who are highly

included may feel they better understand their partner's reasoning for behavior and will want to think the best in every situation because it is essentially reflection of themselves (Aron et al., 1992).

- 3) Those high in self-expansion in their relationship, as opposed to those low in self-expansion, will make relationship enhancing attributions towards their partner. Those that grow with their partner feel better about their partner and their relationship and will therefore think the best of their partner's behavior in every scenario (Aron et al., 2013).
- 4) When self-expansion and inclusion of other in the self's influence on relationship-enhancing attributions are tested simultaneously, self-expansion's influence will be stronger than inclusion of the other in the self's. Self-expansion and inclusion of other in the self are related by distinct constructs (Aron et al., 2013). Research generally suggests that self-expansion (i.e., the extent of the growth provided by the relationship) matters more for relationship functioning than inclusion of other in the self.

### Method

#### Participants

Participants included 72 females and 20 males from a private university in the Northeast United States. The age range of participants was from 18 to 61, with the mean of ages being 19.97. The participants were 84% European American, 2% Asian-American, 9% Latin-American, 1% African American, and 4% other. In addition, 33% were freshman, 25% were sophomores, 26% juniors, 15% seniors, and 1% other. The

participants were from the undergraduate subject pool recruited by means of a convenience sample. Also, participants were required to be in a relationship in order to participate. All participants received credit towards their SONA research for participation in the experiment.

## Measures

**Self-concept clarity.** This measures how clear and consistent the participant is on who he or she is as a person (Self-Concept Clarity Scale, SCC; Campbell et al., 1996). The scale consists of 12 items, two of them being "I spend a lot of time wondering about what kind of person I really am" and "In general I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am." Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*; 5=*strongly agree*). In the present study alpha was .87.

**Self-expansion.** This measures how much the participant grows as a person within the relationship (Self-Expansion Questionnaire, SEQ; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002). The scale consists of 14 items, two of them being "How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?" and "How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?" Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1=*not very much*; 7=*very much*). In the present study alpha was .90.

**Inclusion of other in the self.** This measures how much the participant feels their partner is a part of them and how much they overlap (Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale, IOS; Aron et al., 1992). This scale gives a series of circles that feature progressively greater degrees of overlap between "self" and "other." The participant chooses which set of circles most accurately

represents how close they are to their partner in their relationship.

**Attributions.** This measures how the participant interprets their partner's behavior (Relationship Attribution Measure, RAM; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). The scale gives 6 scenarios of their partner's behavior, for example "Your significant other makes an important decision that will affect the two of you without asking for your opinion." Then, the participant answers a series of questions pertaining to that behavior such as "My partner's behavior was due to something about him/her (e.g., the type of person he/she is, the mood he/she was in). For the purpose of this study the researchers added two neutral scenarios. The scenarios are as follows "Your partner picks up the movie you two are going to watch that night" and "Your partner tells you they love you." Participants responded on a 6-point Likert scale (1=*disagree strongly*; 6=*agree strongly*). For good behaviors (e.g., your partner compliments you, your partner treats you more lovingly) we scored dispositional, high on stability, and high on globality attributions as relationship enhancing. For bad behaviors (e.g., your partner begins to spend less time with you, your partner does not pay attention to what you are saying) we scored situational, low on stability, and low on globality attributions as relationship enhancing.

**Demographics.** The demographic sheet asked participants' age, academic standing, ethnicity, relationship status and length, and whether the participant had any additional comments, or if there was anything they liked or disliked in particular about the study.

## Design and Procedure

Participants signed up in advance for this study for a twenty minute time slot through a web based participant pool, known as SONA.

After informed consent and in accordance with the correlational between subjects design, the researchers instructed participants to complete the surveys given. The surveys consisted of measures for the three quasi-independent variables (self-concept clarity, inclusion of the other in the self, and self-expansion) and the dependent variable (attributions). Last, the researchers presented participants with the demographics sheet to fill out and upon completion the researchers debriefed the participant and thanked them for their time.

## Results

Table 1 shows bivariate correlations along with means and standard deviations for self-concept clarity, self-expansion, IOS, and relationship enhancing attributions.

### Relationship Enhancing Attributions

**Expansion vs. IOS.** There was a weak significant positive correlation between self-expansion and relationship enhancing attributions ( $r=.29$ ,  $p =.005$ ). As self-expansion increases the use of relationship enhancing attributions does as well. Therefore, those who self-expand more also give relationship enhancing attributions more. The relationship between inclusion of the other in self and relationship enhancing attributions correlated positively as well ( $r=.22$ ,  $p =.039$ ), as did the relationship between the two independent variables IOS and self-expansion ( $r =.22$ ,  $p =.035$ ).

As shown with Figure 1, we conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis in which relationship enhancing attributions was the dependent variable and self-expansion and IOS were the independent variables. The overall  $R^2$  was .11,  $F(2, 89) 5.49$ ,  $p = .006$ . The standardized regression coefficients were .26 for self-expansion and

.16 for IOS. Only the coefficient for self-expansion was significant,  $t(89) 2.52$ ,  $p = .014$ . Note the slight discrepancy between the self-expansion bivariate correlation with attributions (.29) and its unique association in the context of the regression equation (partial  $r = .26$ ). The association of inclusion of other in the self with relationship enhancing attributions was reduced by controlling for self-expansion (from a bivariate  $r$  of .22 to a partial  $r$  of .16). As such, when self-expansion was incorporated relationship enhancing attributions were affected more. Hence, self-expansion is more important for influencing relationship attributions rather than IOS. When partialing out self-expansion, IOS still failed to have any significant association with relationship enhancing attributions.

**Expansion vs. clarity.** There was no significant relationship between self-concept clarity and relationship enhancing attributions ( $r=.11$ ,  $p =.303$ ). Therefore, those who have a high self-concept clarity do not necessarily utilize relationship enhancing attributions more. There was also no significant correlation between the two independent variables self-expansion and self-concept clarity ( $r=.11$ ,  $p =.289$ ).

We conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis in which relationship enhancing attributions was the dependent variable and self-expansion and self-concept clarity were the independent variables. The overall  $R^2$  was .09,  $F(2, 89) 4.49$ ,  $p = .014$ . The standardized regression coefficients were .28 for self-expansion, and .08 for self-concept clarity. Only the coefficient for self-expansion was significant,  $t(89) 2.80$ ,  $p = .006$ . There was a very slight discrepancy between self-expansion bivariate correlation with attributions (.29) and its specific association in the context of the regression equation (partial  $r = .28$ ). The association of



self-concept clarity with relationship enhancing attributions was also reduced slightly by controlling for self-expansion (from a bivariate  $r$  of .11 to a partial  $r$  of .08). Therefore, self-expansion is more important to relationship enhancing attributions than self-concept clarity. When partialing out for self-expansion, self-concept clarity still failed to have any significant association with relationship enhancing attributions.

**IOS vs. clarity.** There was no significant relationship between the two independent variables IOS and self-concept clarity ( $r=.17$ ,  $p=.105$ )

We conducted a simultaneous multiple regression analysis in which relationship enhancing attributions was the dependent variable and self-concept clarity, and IOS were the independent variables. The overall  $R^2$  was .05,  $F(2, 89) 2.43$ ,  $p=.094$ . The standardized regression coefficients were .07 for self-concept clarity, and .20 for IOS. Neither of the coefficients were significant. Note the minor discrepancy between self-expansion bivariate correlation with attributions (.29) and its association in the context of the regression equation (partial  $r=.26$ ). When controlling for self-concept clarity, IOS was reduced for in its association with relationship enhancing attributions (from a bivariate  $r$  of .22 to a partial  $r$  of .16). Neither IOS nor self-concept clarity were more important in influencing relationship enhancing attributions. When partialing out for self-concept clarity, IOS still failed to have any significant association with relationship enhancing attributions.

## Discussion

The purpose of the study was to examine if aspects of the self, specifically inclusion of the other in the self, self-expansion, and self-concept clarity influence relationship

attributions. Or rather, the way individuals interpret their partner's behavior. As hypothesized, those who feel that their partner is very much a part of them and grow in their relationships through expansion consistently thought of their partner's behavior in a positive light, no matter the scenario. Additionally as hypothesized, self-expansion mattered above and beyond the influence of inclusion of the other in the self for relationship enhancing attributions. Contrary to hypothesis, self-concept clarity did not influence the prevalence of relationship enhancing attributions.

## Inclusion of the Other in the Self

The results indicate that individuals who feel a high amount of inclusion of the other in the self in their relationship, rather than those who feel a low amount, use more relationship enhancing attributions. A high amount of inclusion of the other in the self signifies a lot of overlap between partners' self-concepts (Aron et al., 1992). Subsequently, this self-other overlap could extend insofar that aspects of the self are confused with that of a partner (Mashek, Aron & Boncimino, 2003). In fact, participants completing a memory task entailing ascribing traits to themselves, their romantic partner, a familiar stranger (a highly recognizable famous person), and a non-familiar stranger (a less recognizable famous person), frequently confused their own traits with those of their romantic partner more than they did with others. As a result, if inclusion of a partner in the self leads to confusing the self with the partner, it is possible that the partner may also receive the same attributional treatment as the self.

The self-serving bias establishes that individuals are more likely to account for dispositional factors when interpreting their own positive behavior (Miller & Ross, 1975). Concurrently, the actor-observer

phenomenon exemplifies how individuals are more likely to account for situational factors when interpreting their own negative behavior (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). Further, induced closeness between partners on a task led to a projection of the self-serving bias onto one another (Sedikides et al., 1998). In sum, feeling very close to a partner and including the partner into the sense of self may influence the “self-like” attributions given. Specifically, in a high inclusion relationship, a partner’s good behavior would be seen as dispositional, yet poor behavior as situational. Conclusively, the more included one feels with the partner, the more likely one will be to use relationship enhancing attributions towards them.

### **Self-expansion**

The results indicate that those with high expanding relationships use relationship enhancing attributions more than those with less expanding relationships. Mainly, couples who self-expand experience more happiness in their relationships, in addition to greater passionate love and commitment (Aron et al., 2000). As a result, it is possible these positive effects create a type of “halo effect,” in which one good behavior influences perception of an individual, believing that they are good in every other aspect (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). In this case, a partner may perceive their significant other to be wholly great in all ways because of the benefits of self-expansion. Henceforth, when explaining their partner’s behavior they are likely to make relationship-enhancing by perceiving partner’s positive behavior as dispositional, stable, and global, whereas negative behavior is situational, unstable and not global.

Self-expansion is a byproduct of a high amount of inclusion of the other in the self (Aron et al., 2013) and as a result it was important to determine which had more of an

influence on relationship enhancing attributions. When we examined self-expansion in conjunction with inclusion of other in the self, we found that while both were significant predictors of relationship-enhancing attributions, self-expansion’s influence was strongest. One reason for this is that there are multiple ways to self-expand, with inclusion of the other being one of several ways. Self-expansion can occur individually (Mattingly & Lewandowski, 2013) and through engaging in new and challenging activities (Aron et al., 2000). Through these activities partners learn about themselves and each other, which increases their sense of self. Thus, self-expansion’s focus is directed towards the quality of relationship additions, providing growth for oneself and one’s partner (Aron et al., 2013). Whereas inclusion of the other in the self is more directed towards quantity (how much of the partner’s sense of self overlaps with one’s own self-concept), and less focused on the quality of what gets included (Aron et al., 1991). That is, inclusion may not always be with a dynamic partner who promotes growth within oneself and the relationship. Consequently, if a partner is not great at providing new and interesting experiences, even though there is high inclusion, one may not be willing to use relationship enhancing attributions towards them (Aron et al., 2013).

### **Self-concept Clarity**

The results indicate that those high on self-concept clarity were not more likely to use relationship enhancing attributions compared to those with less self-concept clarity. Similarly, self-concept clarity did not predict relationship enhancing attributions when accounting for the influence of self-expansion or inclusion of the other in the self. Self-concept clarity relates to accuracy; specifically research has shown that those high on self-concept clarity are more accurate

on many facets (Lewandowski & Nardone, 2012).

To demonstrate, a study measuring self-concept clarity accuracy had participants and one of their friends complete a survey assessing the level of self-concept clarity in the participant (Lewandowski & Nardone, 2012). Participants with higher self-concept clarity had more consistent results with that of what their friends thought of them. Not only are those with high self-concept clarity more accurate in self-assessment, but they are also more accurate in predicting their own future behavior. These results suggest that those with high self-concept clarity are potentially more accurate at assessments of their partner and their partner's behavior as well. Greater accuracy would seem to require perceiving the partner more clearly, which may discourage enhanced perceptions.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

As with all studies, there were limitations that possibly played a role in weakening the study. Whether an individual identifies as independent or interdependent may influence their attributions (Kühnen et al., 2013). Those in a collectivist culture tend to make dispositional attributions, whereas those in an individually driven culture typically attribute the source of events as global. Therefore, there could be a problem cross culturally in generalizing to an entire audience of individuals. Though, the research emphasizes that the primary influence on attributions is what is more salient (dispositional or situational influences) rather than culture. As a result, culture should not have an overarching impact on the present research.

Also, the issue of self-report arose because participants may have not been completely honest in response. Nevertheless, past research utilized self-report as a way to

assess the same variables of the self and yielded substantial results (Aron et al., 1991, Lewandowski & Nardone, 2012; Mattingly et al., 2012). Ultimately, it should not have had a detrimental influence on the present study. Additionally, though the gender distribution in the present study is a potential limitation, past research on relationship attributions has generally found that participant gender was not a key determinant of attributions (Durtschi et al., 2011).

However, there are notable strengths in the study as well. Researchers used randomization throughout the study to ensure no order effect and researchers carried out the study consistently, with little change. Also, researchers employed the use of reliable scales from past research that previously generated significant results (Aron et al., 1991; Campbell et al., 1996; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002).

### **Future Directions**

Although research has looked at how aspects of the self influence attributions before, with factors such as personality and attachment (Pearce & Halford, 2008; Regan & Totten, 1975), there has yet to be substantial research on how inclusion of the other in the self, self-concept clarity, and self-expansion altogether influence attributions. Future research may want to focus on how an individual's self-concept clarity may make them more accurate in assessing behavior, rather than relationship enhancing. Those with higher self-concept clarity are better at predicting their own future behavior (Lewandowski & Nardone, 2012); potentially also making them better at accurately perceiving partner's behavior. As such, research may want to investigate if a partner's level of self-concept clarity dictates their accuracy in partner behavior interpretation.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether certain aspects of the self like self-expansion, inclusion of the other in the self, and self-concept clarity play a role in the amount of relationship enhancing attributions given. As hypothesized, those who self-expand more and have a high amount of inclusion of the other in the self use relationship enhancing attributions more often. However, the level of someone's self-concept clarity does not factor into their relationship enhancing attributions. Additionally, as hypothesized, self-expansion was more important for relationship enhancing attributions than inclusion of the other in the self. The results potentially indicate that the sense of self, in the context of the relationship, influences partner behavior interpretation. Further, taking a part in activities that promote growth with a partner, as well as having a partner very involved in one's own self-concept, will ultimately benefit the relationship when understanding a partner's behavior.

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Table 1

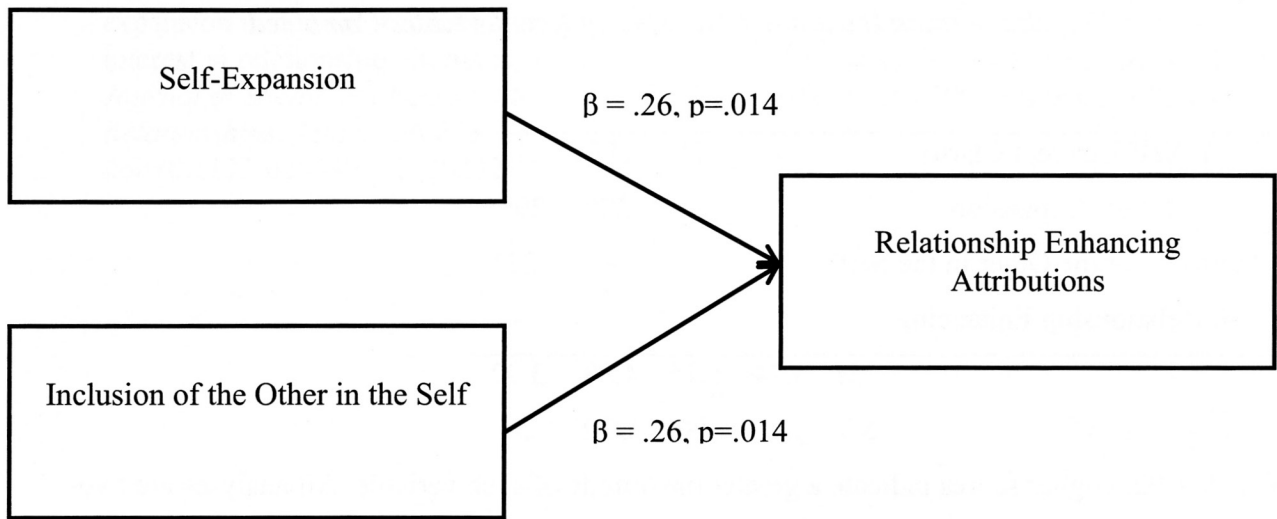
*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables Combined*

Scale	1	2	3	4
1. Self-Concept Clarity	-	.11	.17	.11
2. Self-Expansion		-	.22*	.29**
3. Inclusion of the Other in the Self			-	.22*
4. Relationship Enhancing				-
<i>M</i>	3.24	5.15	4.89	3.92
<i>SD</i>	.73	.86	1.30	.54

*Note.*  $N = 92$ . Higher scores indicate a greater magnitude of each variable. All analyses are two-tailed.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .





*Figure 1.* Regression for Self-Expansion and Inclusion of the Other in the Self on Relationship Enhancing Attributions