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Level of Construal and the Ideal Self: Implications for Attraction and Support Provision

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Abstract of the Dissertation

Level of Construal and the Ideal Self: Implications for Attraction and Support Provision

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The current work explores how level of action construal (i.e., construing action in abstract, purpose-oriented terms relative to concrete, process-oriented terms) influences whether interpersonal attraction and social-support provision are experienced as pertinent to one's important self-ideals. Across four experiments, temporal distance influenced how pertinent individuals' own ideal self-views (i.e., ideal goals, traits, values, and preferences) were to their feelings of attraction toward various targets, their evaluations of support provision situations, and their anticipated experiences during support provision to a close other. Participants thinking about events in the distal future, relative to participants thinking about events in the proximal future, were more attracted to and felt more positively toward individuals emulating their own ideals (Experiments 1 and 3), viewed support as more appropriate when in accordance with their ideal support preferences (Experiment 2), and associated their anticipated comfort and emotions expected during an upcoming support provision interaction involving a close other more strongly with their overall support provision preferences (Experiment 4). Proposed implications for interpersonal attraction and for ameliorating discordant social support among close others are discussed.

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Theories of social behavior long have assumed that an individual's sense of self reflects how that individual is perceived and responded to by close others (James, 1890; Cooley, 1902; Mead 1934; Leary et al., 1995). More recently, research on close relationships has found support for the complementary proposal that individuals are attracted to others who respond to them in ways that confirm or promote their ideal self-concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Herbst, Gaertner, & Insko, 2003). The present work examines how a contextual moderator that thus far has received little attention in relationship research, one's level of construal of action representation, may constrain this proposed process whereby people construe their relationship choices as reflections of their own important aims, goals, and values. Besides examining initial interpersonal attraction, the present work also examines attitudes toward social support provision within relationships, given recent evidence that receiving support discordant with one's own preferences from a close other can cause feelings of anxiety, shame, and confusion (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Hong et al., 2005; Penninx et al., 1998). Whereas much research on discordant support interactions has focused on the thoughts and feelings of support recipients, the thoughts and feelings of those providing discordant support have been largely ignored. The current proposal aims to better understand how individuals' own support preferences and ideal desire to be supportive influence the affect they anticipate experiencing as they provide support to close others. To flesh out these research aims, the following sections review and integrate the separate research literatures on which they draw.

The Ideal Self and Attraction

The *ideal self* is a representation of the characteristics, qualities, aspirations, and goals that an individual ideally wishes to possess (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Higgins, 1987). When there is a discrepancy between one's actual self and one's ideal self, feelings of shame, disappointment, and failure result (Higgins, 1987; Strauman & Higgins, 1987). Recently, relationship theorists have posited that not only do we strive to attain these idealized attributes ourselves, but we also strive to associate with others who possess them. It is not only an individual's similarity to our actual self that attracts us to him or her, but rather that individual's similarity to our ideal self (Klohnen & Luo, 2003; LaPrelle, Hoyle, Insko, & Bernthal, 1990). It appears that our attraction to a potential relationship partner increases as we perceive him or her as emulating the type of person we ideally strive to become ourselves (Herbst et al., 2003).

The desire to enter into relationships, and be associated with, individuals who possess the qualities we value ourselves appears motivated by a primary human desire to evaluate ourselves positively and avoid the feelings of failure that result from discrepant domains of the self (i.e., actual/ideal). If we are unable to attain our ideal attributes and goals, we can associate with others who have, and bask in their reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980). Aron et al (1991) explain that in a close relationship, resources, perspectives, and characteristics of the self and the other merge, and these central aspects of the other actually become included in the self. Our relationship partners become extensions of the self; their attributes, qualities, and experiences are thought of as our own. Social identity theory maintains that associating with those who make positive contributions to our social identity brings us a sense of

satisfaction (Tajfel, 1972, 1974). Cialdini et al. (1976) speculates that these positive contributions affect not only our social identity but our self-image as well.

Discordant Social Support Interactions

As close relationships develop, shared realities (i.e., shared perspectives and reactions to life events) form. However, periods of stress, crisis or major life change can bring aspects of these shared realities into question (Meyer, 1987). The coping literature provides many examples of mismatches in perceptions and reactions of relationship partners to stressful and traumatic events (see Littlewood et al., 1991, Wing et al., 2001). For example, in instances in which emotion-focused support from close others (i.e., just being there, showing love and concern) is the type of support actually desired, but only problem-focused support (i.e., providing transportation, giving advice, rendering post-surgical care) is received, support recipients tend to feel as though their desire for emotion-focused support is wrong, or a sign of weakness, sometimes causing feelings of incompetence, helplessness, and dependency (Penninx et al., 1998).

Although coping measures assessing how individuals cope, in general, with negative life events and stressors show that emotion-focused support seeking and problem-focused support seeking generally occur concurrently (Carver, Scheier, & Weintrub, 1989; Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, 1985), support recipients do exhibit clear preferences for the type of support they most prefer to receive in specific situations (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Manne et al., 1997, Reynolds & Perrin, 2004). Therefore, in discordant support interactions among close others, it is not the specific type of support that is most desired and the specific type of support actually received that are of main importance in the current research, but rather that a discordance exists at all, because it is the discordance itself that leads to feelings of confusion and pain (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Hong et al., 2005). Support recipients' experiences of discordant social support interactions with close others have been studied somewhat extensively; however, less is known of support providers' experiences of such interactions. Why is it that support providers so often give those who they are closest to and care the most about inappropriate forms of support?

Self-Pertinence of Social Support Provision

Research points to characteristics of support recipients such as their personality (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997) or their self presentation (Silver, Wortman, and Crofton, 1990) as influencing support providers' perceptions of them and thus providers' offerings of support. The present work examines whether an additional determinant of support appropriateness grows from the degree to which support providers perceive their support as relevant to their own self-construals. As described above, receiving support from a relationship partner that is dissonant with the support that is desired for the self can challenge one's sense of a shared reality with that partner and evoke feelings of confusion and depression. In these situations, support recipients appear to question their own self-views and ask, "What does the support I receive say about me?" Perhaps support providers analogously ask, "What does the support I provide say about me?" Providing a close other with support that is discordant with one's own ideal standards and self-views can be expected to be aversive. Providing such support can take one's actual self even further from one's ideal self, thus resulting in feelings of confusion, pain, and failure (Higgins, 1987; Strauman & Higgins, 1987). To avoid such feelings, individuals

may provide close others with support that is discordant with others' preferences and desires, but in line with their own.

Abstract and Concrete Action Construals

Understanding processes underlying these phenomena requires examining the conditions under which they are most likely to occur. When, that is, are individuals most likely to be attracted to others that approximate their own ideal standards? When are individuals most likely to provide support to others in a manner most concordant with their own ideal self-views? To address these questions, the present work examines a contextual moderator that thus far has received little attention in relationship research, level of construal of action representation. Any action can be construed at varying levels of abstraction, from low levels, specifying its process, or *how* it is performed, to high levels, specifying its purpose, or *why* it is performed (Vallacher & Wegner, 1985, 1987; also Carver & Scheier, 1999; Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960; Powers, 1973; Trope & Liberman, 2003). Joining the army, for example, could be construed as "signing up," a relatively low-level identification of the process of *how* one joins the army, or as "promoting the nation's defense," a relatively high-level identification of the purpose of *why* one joins the army (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Focusing directly on different aspects of a situation influences how abstractly one construes it (e.g., Vallacher et al., 1992). The general accessibility of cognitive operations of considering activities' purpose versus process also can carry over from one task to another, to influence how abstractly one construes new information (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004). Moreover, increasing temporal distance increases the salience of abstract, high-level features of actions and situations (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Whether reflecting the impact of specific contextual cues, general self-regulatory mindsets, or temporal distance, adopting a low-level construal of the concrete procedures of action narrows one's focus to the specific task at hand, whereas adopting a high-level construal of the abstract meaning of action widens one's focus to its broader purposes.

Of greatest relevance to the present research, among the most abstract purposes one can pursue is being the kind of person one desires to be. Accordingly, cybernetic models place desired self-concepts at the very top of goal hierarchies, with more concrete sub-goals serving as means of realizing those abstract self-standards (e.g., Carver & Scheier, 1999). Integrating research on action construal and self-guides, then, the present analysis suggests that construing action in high-level, abstract terms facilitates viewing one's behaviors and decisions as relevant to one's own standards, values, and goals. From this standpoint, dwelling on the purposes of one's actions (e.g., "joining the army") should lead one to consider not only those actions' anticipated outcomes (e.g., "promoting the nation's defense") but also those actions' relations to one's own important self-guides (e.g., "being strong"; "being brave"; or "being responsible"). When focused on immediate, low-level details of action, in contrast, behaviors and decisions should be more likely to be viewed as compartmentalized within the domain or task at hand and therefore not pertinent to one's self-views (see also Baumeister, 1990; Emmons, 1992), as has been speculated to be true of individuals who commit unconscionable violence while focusing exclusively on the low-level details of their behavior (Lifton, 1986).

Seeing Oneself in One's (Abstractly Construed) Relationships

These hypothesized differences in the construed self-pertinence of one's actions suggest novel implications for interpersonal attraction and support provision. From the present standpoint, relationship choices, like other decisions, can be related further abstractly to one's high-level standards, aims, and values. Choosing a partner, in this light, can be viewed as a means of realizing one's self-standards, and one's choice therefore would be viewed as pertinent to the kind of person one is and wants to become. As a result, relationship partner characteristics compatible with one's own desired goals should increase in value, as assumed by classic motivation theories that view goal-supportiveness as a principle determinant of positive valence (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944; for review, see Brendl & Higgins, 1996). For a person who desires career success, for example, the positive valence of the characteristic of competence would then contribute particularly positively to his or her overall evaluation of a potential partner perceived as highly competent. Moreover, thinking at a higher level of construal should influence individuals' evaluations of the appropriateness of support offered in social support situations and their anticipated comfort in providing support to a close other that is either discordant or concordant with their own support preferences. When construing action abstractly, one should be more likely to link specific actions (such as providing support to close other) with the broader purpose of achieving and maintaining one's own ideals (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982).

Overview of Experiments

Four experiments explored the impact of individuals' level of action construal and their own ideal self-views on their evaluations and subjective experiences pertaining to attraction and social-support provision. Experiments 1 and 2 examined how participants' level of construal influenced their attraction to similar individuals (Experiment 1) as well their evaluations of support appropriateness in discordant support interactions involving similar others (Experiment 2). In Experiments 3 and 4, participants expected to interact directly with varying target individuals in stressful support-provision interactions in which they expected to serve as the support provider. Experiment 3 examined whether level of construal moderated participants' preferences to interact closely with and provide support to an individual aspiring toward their own personal goals. Lastly, Experiment 4 examined whether participants' construal levels moderated the impact of their ideal support-provision preferences on their anticipated affective experiences during an upcoming interaction with their romantic partners.

Experiment 1

This experiment manipulated the accessibility of participants' own uncompleted life goals. As shown in classic demonstrations of the motivational potency of uncompleted goals (Lewin et al., 1944; see also Bargh et al., 2002; Liberman, Förster, & Higgins, 2006), making accessible uncompleted life goals should motivate participants to take actions that would allow them to reach those goals. The experiment next further manipulated whether two candidates for student office were portrayed as behaving

compatibly or incompatibly with participants' aspirations. In this way, this experiment allows examining whether the same candidate would be evaluated differently as a function of whether the candidate's behavior was concordant versus discordant with participants' own accessible goals. I predicted that participants considering candidates set to take office in the distant (rather than proximal) future would be most likely to vote for candidates behaving concordantly with their own personal goals.

Method

Participants

Ninety-six SUNY, Stony Brook undergraduates participated in this experiment in the fall of 2005 in exchange for course credit.

Goal Priming

Participants were asked to complete a series of tasks over the computer. In the first task participants were randomly assigned to think about either an unfinished career- or health-related goal. All participants received the following prompt (divergent information given to those in the health-related goal condition appears in parentheses).

> We all have goals that we really want to attain but have not met yet. For example, most people want to have a great career (*to improve their health*), but we usually have not yet been able to reach our maximum potential. In this portion of the experiment, we will ask you to write briefly about currently unfinished goals you have concerning your CAREER (*concerning physical EXERCISE*). Please think about a goal you really want to attain concerning your job prospects (*physical exercise*). Even if you already have good career expectations (*are in great shape*), most likely there is probably more you could do to improve your chances of a successful career (*your physical appearance, as well as your health, by exercising*). Below please describe an unfinished goal you would really love to attain related to your career (*physical exercise*). Please provide enough details to us to understand: a) What is your unfinished career goal; and b) How meeting this goal would make you feel.

Participants were given open-ended space to type about their unfinished goals. Upon completing and submitting their descriptions, participants were asked to respond to the following questions about their goals (specific to condition): For the unfinished career goal (*exercise goal*) you just described, please list (1) one thing that could STOP you from reaching this goal; (2) one thing that could HELP you reach this goal; (3) one good feeling you would feel if you could reach it; and (4) ANOTHER good feeling you would feel if you could reach it.

Participants then completed a series of unrelated questions in which they were asked their preferences about series of abstract figures. This filler experiment was added to minimize the likelihood that participants perceived connections between the different parts of the experiment.

Evaluation of Political Candidates

In the next phase of the experiment, participants were told that, in collaboration with SUNY Stony Brook's Psychology Department and other universities in the Northeast United States, PsiChi, a national honor society in psychology, needed help electing regional representatives. Accordingly, participants were informed that experimenters using the Stony Brook subject pool to collect data had agreed to add a brief election poll to their experiments.

Temporal distance manipulation. Participants were randomly assigned to either the *near-future* condition or the *distant-future* condition. Participants in the near-future condition were told that they would be electing a representative to the position of Northeast Regional Secretary for the term of December 2005 – December 2006, whereas participants in the distant-future condition were told that they were electing a representative for the term of January 2007 – January 2008, a term beginning approximately one year from the date of the experiment.

Candidate depictions. Participants then viewed photos, presented simultaneously, of each candidate accompanied by a brief description ostensibly provided by each respective candidate. Participants were told that this would be the only information that they would have to make their decision. One photo depicted a college-aged female running on a treadmill. The description accompanying this photo explained that the candidate chose this photo because trying to stay healthy and fit is a goal that is really important to her. The photo of the other candidate depicted a college-aged female in a lab coat looking at an X-ray. The description of this photo explained that the photo was taken at the candidate's internship in a medical laboratory, and that it was chosen because the candidate is excited about the career potential this internship has created for her. In neither photo was the candidate's face visible. The side of the screen that the photos appeared on (i.e., the left or right side) was counterbalanced for all participants.

Candidate choice. After viewing the photos and descriptions, participants were asked to select (by clicking, via computer mouse, the appropriate box) the candidate they choose for the position of the Northeast Regional Secretary of PsiChi.

Results

Manipulation Check

No significant differences were found on ratings of attractiveness and competence of the candidates between the near-future and distant-future conditions, $t(94) = -31$, $p = .75$ and $t(94) = -.81$, $p = .42$, respectively, thus indicating that the candidates and their photos were not presented in a way that, overall, rendered them more or less attractive or competent as a function of temporal distance.

Candidate Choice

A 2 x 2 chi-square test of independence indicated that the frequencies of self-goal-compatible (versus self-goal-incompatible) choices differed significantly as a function of temporal distance to the candidate's term, $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 3.81$, $p = .05$. As shown in Figure 1, participants in the distant-future condition chose the candidate who was pursuing a goal that was compatible with their own goal more frequently ($n = 37$) than the candidate who was pursuing a goal that was incompatible with their own ($n = 14$), $\chi^2 (1, N = 51) = 10.37$, $p < .001$. In contrast, participants in the near-future condition chose self-goal-compatible candidates ($n = 24$) no more frequently than self-goal-incompatible candidates ($n = 21$), $\chi^2 (1, N = 45) = .20$, $p = .65$.

Discussion

This experiment provides strong evidence that when thinking abstractly (i.e., about events in the distal future), individuals are more attracted to others that most emulate the type of person they are ideally striving to become themselves. In this experiment, participants in the distant-future condition favored the student candidate who was working hard to accomplish their own unfinished life goals. Although participants would have no direct contact with the favored student, they ultimately chose her to serve as their representative on a student organization. Perhaps, associating with this individual, even indirectly, allowed participants to bask in her reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976; Cialdini & Richardson, 1980); thus ameliorating any feelings of discomfort they experienced when thinking about their own unfinished life goals. Previous research has shown that such "basking" effects are at play in romantic relationships in which individuals come to include the other in the self (Aron et al., 1991); interestingly, the current research illustrates that such effects also influence feelings of attraction toward individuals that one will never actually come into contact with, nor be in a close relationship with, but who will serve as a representative for the self in some capacity. Further, and most importantly, level of construal (i.e., thinking abstractly versus concretely), a factor that has thus far received little attention in relationship research, influenced how strongly a female student's similarity to one's ideal self impacted feelings of attraction toward her. Experiment 2 will expand on these findings by exploring how other ideal self-views (i.e., participants' own social support preferences) interact with level of construal (as manipulated by temporal distance) to influence their evaluation of the appropriateness of social support offered in discordant social support interactions.

Experiment 2

Although previous research shows that emotion-focused and problem-focused support seeking generally occur concurrently (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, 1985), support recipients do exhibit preferences for the type of support that is most important for them to

receive in a given situation (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Manne et al., 1997, Reynolds & Perrin, 2004). When the most desired support is not received the results can be quite detrimental, even if the lesser desired support is received. Whereas many studies such as those cited previously illustrate that emotion-focused support is viewed as the most beneficial, and thus more desired, form of support for the majority of support recipients (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Manne et al., 1997), other research indicates that problem-focused support (i.e., providing information and advice to support recipients) can be just as desired or effective, or even more so (Helgeson & Cohen, 1996).

This experiment explores whether participants have specific preferences for either emotion-focused or problem-focused support in various situations (i.e., a romantic relationship breakup and preparing for a stressful speech) and how such preferences, along with participants' level of action construal, impact participants' ratings of the appropriateness of support provided in two vignettes. In both vignettes, the type of support provided was discordant with the type of support desired by the support recipient. I hypothesized that participants thinking abstractly (i.e., those in the distal condition) would evaluate instances of support provision that are discordant with the support recipients' preferences, but concordant with their own, as more appropriate than would participants thinking concretely (i.e., those in the proximal condition). Based on the present theorizing, participants thinking more abstractly should think about how a specific action, in this case support provision, relates back to approximating their ideal self. Therefore, their ideal preferences, more so than the preferences of the support recipients in the vignettes, should impact their views of how appropriate the support is.

Pilot Test

To illustrate that individuals do have a stronger preference to receive either problem-focused support or emotion-focused support in specific situations, apart from their preferences on general coping measures, a pilot test was first performed to assess the relationship between participants' responses to forced-choice questions assessing preferences for either emotion-focused or problem-focused support in specific coping situations and individuals' more general, overall support preferences, as assessed by a reliable coping measure (i.e., the COPE; Carver et al., 1989).

Participants

Seventy-seven Stony Brook undergraduates participated in this experiment in exchange for course credit.

Assessing Participants' Coping and Support Preferences

General Support Preferences. Participants first completed a modified version of the COPE to identify different ways in which people respond to stress (Carver et al., 1989). This modified version included 5 distinct coping dimensions, from the original 14-dimensions, that are most indicative of problem-focused coping/support seeking and emotion-focused coping/support seeking. Participants indicated how often on a scale ranging from 1 ("I usually don't do this at all") to 4 ("I usually do this a lot") they use 20 different coping techniques when dealing with difficult and stressful situations, in

general. The five coping dimensions in this modified version were as follows: to assess Problem-Focused Coping/Support Seeking: Active coping ("I do what has to be done, one step at a time"), Planning ("I try to come up with a strategy about what to do"), and Instrumental Social Support Seeking ("I try to get advice from someone about what to do"); to assess Emotion-Focused Coping/Support Seeking: Venting of Emotions ("I feel a lot of emotional distress and I find myself expressing those feelings a lot") and Emotional Support Seeking ("I get sympathy and understanding from someone").

Specific Support Preferences. Next, participants indicated the type of social support they would most prefer to receive in two different situations. First, participants were asked to choose which type of support they would most prefer to receive from a close friend when dealing with a painful breakup, (1) to have him or her listen to their emotions and feelings pertaining to the breakup and trying to comfort them (i.e*., emotion-focused support*), or (2) to have him or her offer advice and guidance on things they could do to get over the breakup (i.e., *problem-focused support*). Participants were asked to circle the choice that best reflected their own personal preferences. Next, participants were asked to choose which type of support they would most prefer to receive from a close friend when stressing out over preparing a speech to deliver to a large lecture hall, (1) to have him or her listen to their fears and emotions about preparing a speech and trying to comfort them (i.e., *emotion-focused support),* or (2) to have him or her offer advice and guidance on how they should prepare the speech (i.e., *problem-focused support*).

Results and Discussion

Participants' scores on two major coping dimensions: Emotion-Focused Coping/Support Seeking ($\alpha = .84$) and Problem-Focused Coping/Support Seeking ($\alpha = .86$) were derived from summing participants' responses to items indicative of each subscale within these two domains (Carver et al., 1989). It is important to note the rather strong correlation found between Problem-Focused Coping/Support Seeking and Emotion-Focused Coping/Support Seeking (Pearson's $r = .52$, $p < .001$), which replicates previous findings illustrating that emotion-focused and problem-focused support seeking generally occur together (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, 1985)

In response to dealing with a painful breakup, the majority of participants preferred to receive emotion-focused support from a close friend (66.7%) rather than problem-focused support (33.3%). In response to stressing out over preparing a speech to be delivered to a large lecture hall, the majority of participants preferred to receive problem-focused support from a friend (85.3%) rather than emotion-focused support (14.7%).

In looking at the relationship between our two coping measures, one assessing participants' general preferences when coping with negative life events and the other assessing specific preferences for either emotion-focused support or problem-focused support in two specific situations, no consistency was found. No significant relationships were found between participants' rated preferences for emotion-focused versus problem-focused support in either support situation (i.e., when coping with a breakup or a preparing for a stressful speech) and their general problem-focused or emotion-focused coping/support seeking as measured by the COPE (Carver et al., 1989), ps $> .24$. These findings replicate previous findings illustrating that although individuals do exhibit stable, overall, coping and support preferences; when they are actually dealing with

specific negative events, they often prefer to receive one type of support more so than another (as shown in Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Manne et al., 1997). Therefore, only the forced-choice items will be used in Experiment 2.

Experiment 2 Method

Participants

Two hundred sixty-five Stony Brook undergraduates participated in this experiment in exchange for course credit.

Participants' Social Support Preferences

Participants completed the forced-choice support preference measure used in the pilot test, in which they indicated the type of support they would most prefer to receive from a close friend (i.e., either emotion-focused or problem-focused support) when coping with a romantic breakup and preparing for a stressful speech.

Level of Construal Manipulation and Perceptions of Social Support Vignettes

After participants finished completing questions assessing their own personal support preferences, they completed, as a filler task, a series of unrelated questions, in which they were asked their about whether they live on or off-campus and what time they most prefer to wake up in the morning. Next, they were randomly assigned to read either a *current* interaction vignette involving Stony Brook students or a *past* interaction vignette involving Stony Brook students. Participants within each condition read two vignettes about discordant social support interactions involving same-gendered college friends. One of the vignettes depicted a situation in which one of the friends (the support recipient) had experienced a negative life event (the dissolution of a romantic relationship) and desired emotion-focused support from his friend (the support provider), but his friend responded by providing problem-focused support. The other vignette depicted the same situation (the breakup); however, in this vignette, the support recipient desired problem-focused support from his friend, but his friend responded by providing emotion-focused support. The framing of the interactions varied so that participants in the *current* condition read the two vignettes about current Stony Brook students and a recently occurring interaction, and participants assigned to the *past* condition read the two vignettes involving past Stony Brook students with the interaction occurring fifteen years in the past.

Participants assigned to the *current* condition received the following instructions, "Please imagine that the following interactions take place TODAY, RIGHT NOW. When reading and answering questions about these interactions, please imagine that they occur <u>today,</u> among <u>current</u> Stony Brook University students." The title "<u>Events Today</u>" appeared over the vignettes. The *current* vignette in which the support recipient desired emotion-focused support but received problem-focused support read as follows, "This afternoon, Donald advises his friend David that the best way to get over his recent breakup is to go out to bars and parties to take his mind off of things and meet new girls. David would rather sort out his thoughts and feelings about the breakup, but Donald persists in suggesting he go out and give it a try."

The *current* vignette in which the support recipient desired problem-focused support but received emotion-focused support read as follows, "This afternoon, Stephan sympathizes with his friend Simon after his recent breakup and encourages him to talk about his thoughts and feelings about the breakup. Simon would rather Stephan give him advice about how he gets over breakups, but Stephan persists in suggesting he talk abut his own thoughts and feelings."

As shown in Appendix A, in the *distant-past* condition, the two vignettes presented above were titled "Events in the Distant Past," and were presented with the instructions, "Please imagine that the following interactions took place in the DISTANT PAST. When reading and answering questions about these interactions, please imagine that they occurred around 15 years ago, among a group of Stony Brook University students that are now long gone."

Perceived Appropriateness

After participants read through the each vignette, they answered two questions assessing their perception of the appropriateness of the support provided; (1) "How appropriate is the help Donald (Stephan) provides to David (Simon) today?" and (2) "Do you think Donald's (Stephan's) support is the right type to provide in the situation today?" Participants responded to both questions on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Extremely"), with the specific wording differing across the *current* and *distant-past* conditions to reflect either present- or past-tense interactions.

Confirming the Level of Construal Manipulation

Action Identification. Participants completed a short version of the Vallacher and Wegner (1989) action identification level scale to ensure the effectiveness of the level of construal manipulation. This measure assesses if individuals perceived 14 different behaviors in more abstract or concrete terms.

Self-Focus. Participants completed the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) to assess their degree of self-focus. This 23-item measure has three subscales: private self-consciousness which assesses the tendency to reflect upon private, autonomous, egocentric goals (i.e., those goals that do not necessarily require one to consider others' reactions to what one is doing); public self-consciousness which assesses the tendency to acknowledge and take into account the needs, desires, or reactions of others; and relatedly, social anxiety which taps into shyness, embarrassment, and anxiety in social situations. Participants indicated on a scale ranging from 0 ("extremely uncharacteristic") to 4 ("extremely characteristic") how characteristic each item is of them.

The order in which the action-identification and self-consciousness measures were assessed was counterbalanced across conditions. After completing these final measures, participants were debriefed concerning the goals of the study.

Results

Participants' Support Preferences

Participant's own social-support preferences differed across contexts and were similar to those found in the pilot study. In response to dealing with a painful breakup, the majority of participants preferred to receive emotion-focused support from a friend (60%), whereas the remainder preferred to receive problem-focused support (40%). In response to preparing a speech to be delivered to a large lecture hall, the majority of participants preferred to receive problem-focused support from a friend (80%), whereas the remainder of participants preferred to receive emotion-focused support (20%).

Manipulation Check

Inconsistent with predictions, no significant difference was found on the Vallacher and Wegner (1989) action identification scale between participants assigned to the *current* and *past* temporal distance manipulation conditions ($p = .23$). Further, no significant differences between conditions were found on the private and public subscales of the Self-Consciousness scale (Fenigstein et al., 1975); however a significant difference between conditions was found on the social anxiety subscale (t (259) = 1.96, $p = .05$), with participants assigned to the *past* condition ($M = 13.05$, $SD = 5.15$) scoring higher on social anxiety than those assigned to the *current* condition ($M = 11.75$, $SD = 5.56$).

Appropriateness of Support Provision in the Vignettes

Responses to the two appropriateness items were related highly for the vignette in which the support provided was problem focused ($r = .71$, $p < .0001$) and also for the vignette in which the support provided was emotion focused ($r = .73$, $p < .0001$). Accordingly, participants' scores on the two items were averaged for each vignette. These composite appropriateness scores were analyzed in a General Linear Model as a function of participants' own support preferences for dealing with a breakup (emotion-focused vs. problem-focused), participants' assignment to temporal distance conditions (current vs. past), the type of support provided in the vignettes (emotion-focused vs. problem-focused; a within-subjects factor), and the interactions between these factors. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of type of support provided, F (1, 259) = 40.25, $p < .0001$, reflecting higher overall perceived appropriateness of emotion-focused than problem-focused support in this (breakup) situation, which was moderated by participants' self- preferences, F (1, 259) = 4.14, $p < .05$. Moreover, the predicted three-way Support Provided x Support Self-Preference x Temporal Distance interaction approached statistical significance, F (1, 259) = 3.22, $p = .074$. Clarifying the nature of this finding, Figure 2 plots the difference in perceived appropriateness of providing emotion- versus problem-focused support, as a function of temporal distance and self-preferences for emotion- versus problem-focused support. As shown, in the past condition, participants who themselves preferred to receive emotion-focused support had higher differential-appropriateness scores (reflecting higher perceived appropriateness of others' provision of emotion- vs. problem-focused support) than did participants who themselves preferred to receive problem-focused support, t (126) = 2.55, $p = .012$. In contrast, in the current condition, participants' own support preferences were not related to their differential-appropriateness scores, t (133) = 0.18, *n.s.*

Discussion

Although previous studies indicate that participants tend to seek both types of support concurrently (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, 1985), the following results indicate that when forced to make a choice, participants were able to, and overall more generally desired emotion-focused support when dealing with a breakup and problem-focused support when preparing for a stressful speech. In line with the findings of Folkman and Lazarus (1985), this may have to do with participants' appraisals of these stressors as either controllable or uncontrollable. One may not be able to control the outcome of a breakup, but he or she can get support from others that will help manage his or her emotions and feelings (i.e., emotion-focused support); whereas on the other hand, one may perceive an upcoming speech as daunting, yet controllable, and therefore ultimately desire aid in developing and perfecting the most effective speech (i.e., problem-focused support).

Temporal distance did moderately influence the importance of participants' own support preferences in predicting how appropriate they found the support offered in a discordant support interaction in which problem-focused support was desired by the support recipient, but emotion-focused support was received. When thinking about this discordant support interaction as occurring in the distal past, individuals' own support preferences became more pertinent to their evaluations of support appropriateness; moreover their desired preference, in that identical situation (i.e., a romantic breakup) was weighted as more important than the clearly indicated support preference of the support recipient in the situation. This was not the case for participants thinking about the interaction as occurring in the present time.

Perhaps participants thinking about this interaction from a more distal perspective related their specific support appropriateness evaluation in this situation back to their overall desire to approximate their ideal self in support provision situations (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Shavelson, et al., 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). If being intimately there for a friend who is struggling with a romantic breakup by offering him or her emotion-focused support is what they think is ideal and "the right thing to do" in a given situation, then when they become more focused on trying to emulate their ideal self, this preference should grow stronger and take precedence over the preference of the support recipient. These individuals will be unable to give anything besides what they deem ideal because providing support that is discordant with their ideals would result in feelings of discomfort (Higgins, 1987; Strauman & Higgins, 1987).

It is important to note that in this study no significant difference between the temporal distance manipulation conditions (*past* versus *current*) was found on a stable measure of level of action construal (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989), however it is assumed that the temporal distance manipulation used in this experiment was still effective in altering participants' levels of construal, due to finding hypothesized differences across temporal distance manipulation conditions. Finding no difference on the manipulation check may suggest cognitive interference from measures of support appropriateness and evaluations of the self occurring before the manipulation check (Allport, Styles, & Hsieh, 1994; Allport & Wylie, 1999). Further, it is evident that participants in the distal past temporal distance condition focused more on the self, than participants in the near-future

condition, as indicated by the greater weight of their own ideal preferences in their evaluations of support appropriateness, but they did not, however, score higher on a measure private self-consciousness, as initially predicted. Interestingly, they did score higher than participants in the near-future condition on a measure of social anxiety. Although this difference was not initially predicted, it potentially illustrates the anxiety these participants experienced while working out the feelings associated with weighing their own ideal preferences over the preferences of others.

Experiment 3

Experiment 3 seeks to expand on the findings of Experiments 1 and 2 by exploring how participants' level of construal impacts their attraction toward individuals to whom they expect to provide social support in an upcoming interaction. Following the present analysis, participants who believe they will be interacting with this individual in the distant-future should be more likely to view the potential interaction partner as an extension of the self and thus choose to interact closely with the individual working toward completing life goals that are compatible with their own personal goals. For those participants who believe they will interact with this individual in the near-future, in contrast, goal-compatibility should be less relevant.

Method

Participants

One hundred female, Stony Brook undergraduates participated in this experiment in exchange for course credit. It is important to note that in this experiment only female participants were used in an attempt to avoid any heterosexual anxiety or arousal that might emerge in male participants at the prospect of interacting closely with an opposite-sex stranger (see Derlega, Barbee, & Winstead, 1994, for a review).

Goal Priming

As in Experiment 1, participants were primed to consider their own unfinished life goals; they answered questions about either an unfinished health-related goal or an unfinished career-related goal.

Evaluation of Support-Provision Recipients

Next (in a later portion of the experiment, after a filler task) participants were told that in an upcoming experiment, they would work closely with a student while she prepared a speech to be presented to a 4-person panel of Stony Brook graduate students. Participants were assured that they would not have to take any part in delivering the speech to the panel (i.e., their co-worker would be the only one delivering all aspects of the speech); participants instead would provide their co-worker with support during the hour before she delivered the speech (i.e., they would help her stay calm, give her

feedback on certain aspects of the speech, listen to a test-run of the speech). Participants then were told that they would be provided with more specific details about compensation for their possible participation in this future experiment at the end of today's experiment.

Temporal distance manipulation. Within each goal condition (i.e., career-related and health-related), participants were either randomly assigned to the *near-future* condition or the *distant-future* condition. Participants in the near-future condition were told that they were choosing a partner to work with in the near future, sometime over the next two weeks, whereas participants in the distant-future condition were told that they were choosing a partner to work with in the distant future, sometime late next semester.

Speech-partner depiction. Participants were told that the two female undergraduates that they were choosing between were participants in a separate, unrelated, experiment that had been going on in the lab for the past month. Specifically, participants were told that, "The goal of this (other) experiment, in which these students have been participating, is to assess the daily stressors that Stony Brook students face and to understand how students cope with such stressors. For this experiment, we have collected a fair amount of descriptive information on our participants' daily lives (i.e., descriptions of their daily routines, their overall interests, what is important to them) and with their permission, we have collected a brief writing sample in which participants describe an activity that they are currently pursuing that they think provides a good example of what is really important to them. To give participants some brief background information on both female students so that they were able to make a more informed choice on whom they wanted to work closely with in the upcoming experiment, participants viewed these writing samples presented simultaneously. These writing samples were expanded versions of the photo descriptions that participants received in Experiment 1 (see Experiment 1 methods for accompanying descriptions). One potential partner's writing sample read, "I have gotten into a regular routine of working out at the gym. I like to run on the treadmill and do some weight training. I am really into this activity because trying to stay healthy and fit is really important to me." The other potential partner's writing sample read, "I have started an internship at a medical laboratory. I am doing this internship because I think one day I would like to go into the medical field and I am very excited about the career potential this internship has created for me." The order in which the writings samples appeared on the screen was counterbalanced. After viewing the descriptions, participants were asked to select the individual that they choose to be their partner in the upcoming experiment.

Manipulation Check

Lastly, participants completed a (14-item) short version of the Vallacher and Wegner (1989) action identification level scale to ensure that the temporal distance manipulation was effective.

Debriefing

After participants made their decision and completed the last measure as a manipulation check, the experiment officially ended and all participants were debriefed as to the true nature of the experiment. It was made clear to the participants that there would be no future experiment being conducted in the lab and that the two female students whose descriptions they read were not real Stony Brook students.

Results

Manipulation Check

When completing Vallacher and Wegner's (1989) Behavior Identification Form at the end of the experiment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .70$), participants who had been assigned to the distant-future condition defined actions more abstractly ($M = 9.28$; $SD = 2.93$) than did participants assigned to the near-future condition ($M = 8.16$; $SD = 2.74$), $t(98) = 1.97$, $p = .05$, Cohen's $d = .39$, thus indicating that the temporal distance effectively manipulated participants' general levels of action construal.

Choice of Interaction Partners and Positivity toward Them

As shown in Figure 3, inconsistent with predictions, a chi-square test of independence showed that the impact of goal compatibility on partner choice was not dependent on temporal distance, χ^2 (1, $N = 100$) = 0.42, *n.s.*. Instead, the impact of goal compatibility on partner choice was impacted significantly by the goal conditions to which participants were assigned, χ^2 (1, $N = 100$) = 17.63, $p < .0001$. Participants overwhelming chose the interaction partner thought to be pursuing a career-related goal ($n = 71$), rather than an exercise goal, ($n = 29$). Moreover, participants rated the career-goal interaction partner more positively ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.73$) than the exercise-goal interaction partner ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 0.83$), t (99) = 3.77, $p < .001$, and this preference was not moderated by Temporal Distance, Assigned Goal, or the Temporal Distance x Assigned Goal interaction (all $Fs < 1$).

Relationship between Positivity toward and Perceived Competence of Interaction Partners

Whether participants felt attracted to interaction partners behaving compatibly with their own goals also can be examined by assessing relations between (a) participants' assessments of interaction partners on goal-relevant dimensions and (b) participants' self- reported positivity toward interaction partners. More specifically, an interaction partner's perceived competence should be more highly relevant to the self-goals of participants oriented toward career success than to the self-goals of participants oriented toward physical exercise. Accordingly, to the extent that participants' attraction to potential interaction partners is based on participants' own accessible goals, a stronger correlation between reported positivity toward and perceived competence of interaction partners should emerge for participants primed to consider career goals than exercise goals. To examine this hypothesized effect, and whether it would be moderated by temporal distance, I computed difference scores between participants' evaluations of (a) the competency of the career-oriented student and exercise-oriented student and (b) positive feelings toward the career-oriented student and the exercise-oriented student (with higher scores indicating more favorable responses to the career-oriented interaction partner). Differential Positivity next was regressed simultaneously onto Differential Competency, Temporal Distance, Goal Assignment, and the interactions between these variables, yielding a significant Differential Competency x Temporal Distance x Goal Assignment interaction, $b = .77$, $SE = .39$, $F(1, 92) = 3.88$, $p = .05$. Clarifying the nature

of this three-way interaction, Figure 4 plots the predicted values of Differential Positivity for participants scoring 1 *SD* above and below the Differential Competence group means separately within the four experimental conditions. As shown, for participants assigned to the distant-future condition, Differential Positivity and Differential Competence were related positively among those who recently had considered their own career goals (Pearson's $r = +.40$, $p < .05$) but not among those who recently had considered their own exercise goals (Pearson's $r = -.16$, $p > .42$), with the difference between these correlation coefficients statistically significant, $z = 1.97$, $p < .05$. In contrast, for participants assigned to the near-future condition, Differential Positivity and Differential Competence were related positively irrespective of whether they recently had considered their own career goals (Pearson's $r = .49$, $p < .02$) or their own exercise goals (Pearson's $r = .55$, $p < .01$), with the difference between these correlation coefficients close to zero, $z = 0.23$.

Discussion

Whereas Experiment 1 illustrated that when thinking abstractly individuals were most attracted to target peers that emulated the type of person they were ideally striving to become, results from Experiment 3 found that participants, in both temporal distance conditions, do not choose these same targets as whom they most desire to work closely with and provide support to in an upcoming stressful situation. It seems that different selection criteria were applied in this new context (i.e., an hour long face-to-face social support interaction). In this context, participants overwhelming chose the student that was rated as more competent, the student that was pursuing a career-related life goal, regardless of whether this goal was compatible or incompatible with their own unfinished life goal, and regardless of whether they were thinking abstractly or concretely. Perceived competency of interaction partners also appears to have impacted participants' feelings of positivity toward these students, except among participants assigned to think about their own unfinished health-related goals within the distant-future condition. For these participants, goal mapping (i.e., viewing the student as working toward a goal they deemed important to the self), rather than perceived competency, seemed to play a stronger role in participants' attraction to that student (as indicated by positivity ratings), independent of their ultimate choices of interaction partner.

Research shows that social support provision can be a stressful experience; support providers tend to feel vulnerable to support recipients' situations which results in feelings of discomfort for support providers (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979). There is no doubt that the partner participants chose would be placed in an anxiety-provoking situation; therefore it is possible that participants proactively tried to minimize their own anticipated discomfort in the role of support provider by selecting the partner who they thought would be the most competent in the given context (i.e., the student who might be better at speech writing, who might cope more positively with stress, and who is therefore less in need of support provision). This possibility is consistent with the finding that the career-oriented interaction partner was rated as more competent, overall, than the exercise-oriented interaction partner. Perhaps individuals' own anxiety about providing

support to a stranger compelled them to focus more on the traits of the two potential partners that would indicate that they could perform competently in the given situation, in an attempt to make the interaction a more beneficial one for themselves (Wicklund & Braun, 1987). Research does show that individuals who are viewed as more socially competent receive a higher level of social support from others, thus suggesting that they are viewed as more attractive social-support recipients (Sarason, Sarason, & Hacker, 1985; Bowling, Beehr, & Johnson, 2004). Participants' desire to interact with a seemingly competent individual in this anxiety-provoking situation may have taken precedence over their desire to interact with an individual who emulates their ideal self.

It is also possible that in this all female sample, women avoided the health-oriented female because they felt threatened or intimidated by her enthusiasm for fitness and working out; overall, participants who chose the career-oriented female did rate the health-oriented female less positively. These feelings of reduced positivity toward her may be in connection with perceiving her as less competent, or participants may have assumed that with fitness being such an important life goal, she would most likely be quite physically fit (recall that, in a departure from Experiment 1, no photos were provided of potential support recipients in Experiment 3, given the experiments' different cover stories; thus, unlike in Experiment 1, in Experiment 3, participants' assumptions of the physical appearance of the targets were not constrained by actual photos). Women tend to feel threatened by physically attractive women and tend to evaluate themselves more negatively when confronted with them; this effect being even more pronounced in women who are dissatisfied with their own bodies (Trampe, Stapel, & Siero, 2007). Perhaps participants anticipated these negative feelings and thus chose to avoid an hour long interaction with this exercise-oriented student because of it. Future experiments need to be conducted to delve further into participants' more specific motivation behind their choices.

The above limitations notwithstanding, an interesting pattern of relationships emerged between self-reported feelings of positivity toward the interaction partner and judgments of the interaction partner's competence. As noted above, an interaction partner's competence should be more highly relevant to career goals than to exercise goals. Thus suggesting that participants in the distant-future condition were most likely to evaluate others on the basis of others' fit to participants' own accessible goals, accessibility of career versus exercise goals moderated the relationship between positivity toward and perceived competence of potential interaction partners among participants in the distant-future condition but not the near-future condition. Participants in the distant-future conditions appeared to base their positivity judgments on interaction partners' perceived competence *only* when they were focused on their own career goals (where competence appears particularly relevant) and *not* when they were focused on their own exercise goals (where competence does not appear relevant). Among participants in the near-future condition, in contrast, assignment of a career versus exercise goal did not impact how positively the interaction partners were evaluated.

In summary, participants' global interaction-partner choices in Experiment 3 appear to have been explained by factors external to the present theorizing. On the other hand, apparently reflecting the increased sensitivity of the more-specific measures of participants' own perceptions of interaction partners' qualities as well as participants' own subjective experiences, the observed patterns of relationships between judgments of

the interaction partner's competence and self-reported feelings of positivity toward the interaction partner appear to support the present work's central proposition that construing action in abstract terms increases the extent to which one is attracted to other people that approximate one's own personal ideals.

Experiment 4

Experiment 4 builds on the findings of Experiment 3 by examining whether participants' desire to provide their significant other with general support, as well as specific types of support (i.e., emotion-focused versus problem-focused), interact with participants' level of action construal to impact their anticipated affective experiences in an upcoming interaction. Participants' own support-provision preferences will be measured and their level of action construal will be manipulated using temporal distance; participants assigned to the *near-future* condition will be led to believe they will be interacting with their significant others in a social-support provision situation in the near-future, whereas participants assigned to the *distant-future* condition will believe this support-provision situation will be occurring in the distant-future. The interaction between these two factors (i.e., support provision ideals and temporal distance) will be examined to see how they influence participants' comfort levels and anticipated emotions when providing support to their significant other.

Participants in the distant-future condition are expected to anticipate greater comfort and positive emotions during support provision, reflecting their hypothesized linking of their actions (in this case support provision) to achieving their ideal values (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Shavelson et al., 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). Most individuals hold an abstract desire to perceive themselves as a supportive relationship partner, however this is not always salient to them; but when this desire is primed, by manipulating temporal distance, participants in the distant-future condition should anticipate less discomfort and overall negative emotions when providing support to their significant other because they will ultimately view this instance as an opportunity to approximate the ideal self (i.e., be a supportive relationship partner), which will beget positive emotions and feelings of comfort. On the other hand, it is expected that participants in the near-future temporal distance condition, whose ideal desires have not been made salient, will not anticipate such positive emotions and feelings of comfort and rather view the upcoming interaction, more concretely, as the somewhat uncomfortable support provision experience it can usually be for many support providers (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979).

Further, previous research illustrates that feelings of increased closeness, empathy, and perspective taking influence the frequency of support provision (Batson et al., 1997; Strurmer, Snyder,& Omoto, 2005; Dovidio, Allen, & Schroeder, 1990), therefore, the following experiment will also explore how such factors interact with temporal distance to impact anticipated subjective experiences during support provision. It is expected that in addition to individuals' ideal desire to perceive themselves as a

supportive relationship partner, they also strive to perceive themselves as a committed relationship partner; therefore participants' commitment to the relationship should more strongly impact their feelings of comfort and positive emotions anticipated during the support interaction when they are thinking of provision occurring in the distant-future, and these ideal desires are made salient to them. Also, views of how participants' current romantic relationship impacts the self (i.e., how it contributes to their views and experiences of the world and how it aids them in achieving their ideal self), should become more salient and influential in subjective experiences related to support provision when this provision is thought to be occurring in the distal future; when participants are more focused on achieving and maintaining what is deemed most ideal for the self.

Method

Participants

Eighty-five Stony Brook undergraduates who had been involved in a romantic relationship lasting longer than two months participated in this experiment in exchange for course credit. Participants were recruited to participate in an experiment on stress and coping in which they would be asked questions about their own and their significant others' coping and social support preferences.

Assessment of Relationship Closeness

In the laboratory, participants sat down at a computer and completed a series of questionnaires assessing their current romantic relationship.

Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (RISC). This 11-item scale measured the extent to which participants think of themselves in terms of their relationships with close others (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements such as "My close relationships are in important reflection of who I am" and "I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my close friends and understanding who they are," on a scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

Modified Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale. For exploratory purposes, I constructed a modified version of the RISC (Cross et al., 2000) assessing the extent to which participants believe that those close to them define themselves using a relational-interdependent self-construal; meaning how much participants believe that their friends and family define themselves in terms of the relationship that they have with the participant. The length and format of this modified measure remained the same as the original RISC (Cross et al., 2000), however, examples of modified items are as follows "My relationships with close others are important reflections of who they are" and "I think one of the most important parts of understanding who my close friends are can be captured by looking at me and understanding who I am."

Relationship Closeness. Participants completed seven single-item questions assessing level of commitment, satisfaction, and quality of alternatives to and investment in their current romantic relationship (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Lewandowski &

Aron, 2002; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). The questions were as follows: (1) I am committed to maintaining my relationship with my partner (2) Our relationship makes me very happy (3) My alternatives to our relationship (dating another, spending time with friends or on my own, etc.) are close to ideal (4) I have put a great deal into our relationship that I would lose if the relationship were to end (5) My partner increases my ability to accomplish new things (6) My partner expands my capabilities in life (7) I have a larger perspective on things because of my partner. Participants answered each question on a scale ranging from 1 ("*Disagree Strongly*") to 7 ("*Agree Strongly*"). Higher scores on an item, indicate higher levels of that variable.

Assessment of Social Support Preferences and Frequency

After completing all relationship measures, participants received the following information;

> The purpose of this experiment is to assess how different types of social support provision influence support recipients' abilities to cope with stressors. The two most common types of support that individuals generally desire and receive when coping with life stressors are *Problem-Focused Support* and *Emotion-Focused Support*. Below are brief descriptions of both.
>
> *Problem-Focused Support:* This type of support includes offering informational support to support recipients such as guidance, advice, suggestions, factual input, and tangible aid such as money or transportation. For example, if you were highly stressed about preparing a speech, a support provider offering *problem-focused social support* would offer you advice on how to write a strong speech based on their own knowledge. They also would provide you with suggestions on how they think you could make your speech stronger.
>
> *Emotion-Focused Support:* This type of support includes communicating caring and concern as well as affirmation and belonging to support recipients. For example, if you were highly stressed about preparing a speech, a support provider offering *emotion-focused social support* would express caring and understanding and encourage you to express your own feelings and reassure you that everything will be ok.

After reading these descriptions, participants were asked to indicate on a scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("A lot") how often in response to stressful life events in general (i.e., things like relationship conflicts, school concerns, health problems) they provide their significant other with Problem-Focused Support. In a separate question, using the same scale and context, they were asked to indicate how often they provide their significant other with Emotion-Focused Support. Next, they were asked to indicate which type of support (Problem-Focused or Emotion-Focused) they would most prefer to provide to their significant other if he or she were stressing out about preparing a speech.

Temporal Distance Manipulation

After completing all questionnaires, participants were given information about an upcoming experiment in which they had the opportunity to come back into the lab with their significant other to participate and receive monetary compensation. They were told that in this future experiment they would be administering support to their significant other in a stressful situation. They were told the following, "In this upcoming experiment, you will be present with your significant other while he or she prepares a speech to be presented to a 4-person panel of Stony Brook graduate students. You will not have any part in delivering the speech to the panel but rather you will provide your partner with support during the hour before he/she delivers the speech."

At this time, participants were assigned randomly to either the *near-future* or the *distant-future* temporal distance condition. Participants in the *near-future* condition were told that they would be interacting with and providing support to their significant other in the near future, sometime over the next two weeks, whereas participants in the *distant-future* condition were told that they would be interacting with and providing support to their significant other in the distant future, sometime late next semester.

Assessment of Comfort Expected and Emotions Anticipated During the Upcoming Support Interaction

Within each condition (i.e., *near-future* and *distant-future*), all participants were told that in this upcoming experiment they would be providing their significant other with either problem-focused support or emotion-focused support when he or she was preparing the speech. All participants were told that the main purpose of this upcoming experiment was to see how these two types of support impact individuals' abilities to cope with this specific stressful situation and that when they came back to the lab, they would be randomly assigned to one of these two support conditions. They were further told that in this upcoming experiment it would be important for their significant others to believe that they (the participants) truly believed in the type of support they would be providing; therefore when they come back into the lab they would be provided with specific scripts describing the type of support they should provide to their partner (i.e., things they should say). It is important to note that discordance or concordance in participants' support desires and their potential support provision are not explicitly stated; however, such associations should be evident to participants based on their natural support tendencies and earlier questionnaire responses.

At this time, all participants were asked how comfortable on a scale of 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("extremely") they felt participating in this upcoming experiment sometime over the next two weeks (for those in the *near-future* condition) or sometime late next semester (for those in the *distant-future* condition) if they had to provide their significant other with problem-focused support while he or she prepared a stressful speech. Participants then completed the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule—Short Form (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) in response to how they would anticipate feeling if they had to provide their significant other with problem-focused support in this upcoming experiment. This modified PANAS self-report mood scale asked participants to rate on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("not at all or very slightly") to 5 ("extremely") to what extent they anticipated experiencing 10 positive (i.e., cheerful, proud, confident) and 10 negative (i.e., nervous, hostile, ashamed) emotional states when providing their significant other with problem-focused support.

Next, participants completed these same two measures pertaining to the possibility of providing their significant others with emotion-focused support, rather than problem-focused support, in this upcoming experiment. So now, all participants were asked how comfortable on a scale of 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("extremely") they felt participating in this upcoming experiment sometime over the next two weeks (for those in the *near-future* condition) or sometime late next semester (for those in the *distant-future* condition) if they had to provide their significant other with emotion-focused support while he or she prepared a stressful speech. Then, they completed the same version of PANAS-short form (Watson et al., 1988) in which they rated on the same 5-point scale to what extent they anticipated experiencing 20 emotional states when providing their significant other with emotion-focused support.

The type of support participants were first asked about providing in this upcoming experiment (i.e., problem-focused versus emotion-focused) was counterbalanced within conditions.

Manipulation Check

As in Experiment 2, participants completed a short version of the Vallacher and Wegner (1989) action identification level scale to ensure that the level of construal manipulation was effective.

To assess whether our proposed mechanism was correct (i.e., that when thinking at a higher level of abstraction, one's actions and decisions will be viewed as reflections of one's ideal self), participants completed two measures pertaining to the self.

Self-Consciousness. To measure degree of self-focus, participants completed the Self-Consciousness Scale (SCS; Fenigstein et al., 1975); please refer to Experiment 2 methods section for more specific details.

Self-Esteem. Participants completed the10-item Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) which is a reliable and valid measure of global self-esteem.

Debriefing

After participants completed these final measures, the experiment ended and all participants were debriefed. It was made clear to participants that no future experiment would be conducted in the laboratory involving them and their significant others.

Results

Manipulation Check

No significant difference was found on the Vallacher and Wegner (1989) action identification scale between participants assigned to the *near-future* condition and the *distant-future* condition ($p = .51$). Further, no significant differences between manipulation conditions were found on any subscales of the Self-Consciousness scale (i.e., private, public, or social anxiety; Fenigstein et al., 1975; ps $> .38$), or on self-esteem ($p = .27$).

Impact of Specific Support Provision Preferences on Anticipated Comfort and Emotions

To test the interaction between participants' own specific support-provision preferences and their temporal distance condition on their comfort levels and anticipated

emotions in regard to support provision in that situation, a series of hierarchical linear regression analyses were performed. A main effect of participants' own speech-specific support provision preference was found for how comfortable they anticipated feeling when providing their significant other with emotion-focused support in the upcoming experiment, $b = 1.72$, $SE = .36$, $t(82) = 4.81$, $p < .001$. When thinking about providing a partner with emotion-focused support, participants who earlier reported general preferences to provide emotion-focused support reported greater anticipated comfort ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.47$) than did participants who earlier reported general preferences to provide problem-focused support ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.84$). No main effect was found for participants' own provision preferences on how comfortable they felt providing their partner with problem-focused support in this upcoming experiment.

A main effect of temporal distance was found for emotions anticipated experiencing when providing both emotion-focused support, t (82) = 1.92, $p = .06$, and problem-focused support, t (82) = 2.64, $p = .01$. Overall anticipated emotion scores were derived by subtracting the negative subscale of the PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) from the positive subscale, within each support condition. Thus, scoring higher on overall anticipated emotion is indicative of experiencing more positive emotions. It is interesting to note that participants assigned to the distant-future condition anticipated experiencing more positive emotions when providing both emotion-focused and problem-focused support to their significant others than participants in the near-future condition. However, no significant interactions were found between participants' support provision preferences for that specific situation (i.e., preparing a stressful speech) and temporal distance on expected comfort or emotions anticipated during support provision for each type of support.

Impact of General Support Provision on Anticipated Comfort and Anticipated Emotions

Participants' overall support provision (of both emotion-focused and problem-focused support combined) was of interest to see how participants' general tendency to offer support to their significant other, when he or she is dealing with negative life events in general, impacted their overall expected comfort and anticipated emotions when providing either type of support (emotion-focused or problem-focused) to their significant other in the upcoming experiment.

Overall anticipated emotion scores were highly related across support type, ($r = .66$, $p < .001$); accordingly, a composite score was derived by averaging both emotion scores to find the overall emotion anticipated when providing support to one's significant other in both situations. In a similar vein, a robust correlation was found between participants' anticipated comfort when providing both types of support (i.e. emotion-focused and problem-focused; $r = .46$, $p < .001$); accordingly, a total comfort score was derived for each participant by averaging their comfort anticipated for each type of support; this total score represents participants' overall comfort anticipated when providing their significant other with any form of support during this upcoming stressful interaction.

To examine how participants' general preferences to provide support to their significant others during general stressful encounters impacted their expected comfort and anticipated emotions during the upcoming social support interaction, a composite overall support provision score was derived by averaging participants overall preference to provide emotion-focused and problem-focused support to their significant other when

he or she is coping with general life stress. This score, participants' assignment to either the near-future or distant-future temporal distance manipulation condition, and the interaction between these variables were entered into separate regression analyses predicting anticipated comfort and emotions. As shown in Figure 5, a significant interaction emerged between overall support-provision preferences and temporal distance on overall comfort level anticipated during support provision in the upcoming interaction. $b = 1.22$, $SE = .60$, $t\ (81) = 2.03$, $p < .05$. The pattern of the interaction was such that a positive association between participants' overall support-provision preferences and their overall anticipated comfort while providing support was found for participants in the distant-future condition ($r = .28$, $p = .08$) but not the near-future condition ($p = .27$). Moreover, as plotted in Figure 6, a significant interaction also emerged between overall support-provision preferences and temporal distance on emotions anticipated during upcoming support provision, $b = 7.32$, $SE = 3.58$, $t\ (81) = 2.05$, $p < .05$. A positive association was found between overall support-provision preferences and anticipated emotions for participants in the distant-future condition (with higher scores on anticipated emotion representing anticipation of more positive emotions; $r = .34$, $p < .05$) but not the near-future condition ($p = .48$).

No further significant effects were found predicting participants' anticipated emotions expected during the upcoming support interaction, therefore the following results pertain solely to participants' anticipated comfort during upcoming support provision.

Impact of Participants' Relationship Commitment on Anticipated Comfort

As plotted in Figure 7, a significant interaction emerged between participants' level of commitment to the relationship and their temporal distance condition for general anticipated comfort during support provision $b = .89$, $SE = .36$, $t\ (81) = 2.44$, $p < .05$. The nature of this interaction was such that for participants in the distant-future condition, the more committed they felt to their relationship, the more comfortable they felt offering support (in general) to their significant other ($r = .40$, $p < .01$); no such association was found for participants in the near-future condition ($p = .49$).

Impact of Relationship Self-Reflection on Anticipated Comfort

To measure participants' assessment of self-benefits received from their current romantic relationship, an overall mean of their agreement with the following, highly correlated, items was computed: "My partner increases my ability to accomplish new things," "My partner expands my capabilities in life," and "I have a larger perspective on things because of my partner" ($\alpha = .83$). The mean of these three variables captures how strongly participants feel that they have gained a great deal from this relationship (i.e., this relationship is helping them to maximize their ideal potential). As shown in Figure 8, this overall relationship self-reflection score interacted with participants' temporal distance condition to predict overall anticipated comfort providing support, $b = .68$, $SE = .30$, $t\ (81) = 2.29$, $p < .05$. The nature of the interaction was such that a positive association between relationship self-reflection and comfort providing overall support was observed among participants in the distant-future condition, ($r = +.30$, $p = .06$) but not the near-future condition ($r = -.21$, $p = .18$).

Impact of Relational-Interdependent Self-Construals on Anticipated Comfort

Finally, as shown in Figure 9, a significant interaction also emerged between participants' relational-interdependent self-construals and their temporal distance

conditions in predicting their anticipated comfort providing support to their significant other, $b = .07$, $SE = .03$, $t\ (81) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. The nature of the interaction was such that in the near-future condition, the association among participants' relational interdependent self-construal and their anticipated comfort providing support was negative in sign (r = -.27, p = .07), whereas within the distant-future condition, this association was positive in sign ($r = + .17$, $p = .29$). No significant interaction was found between participants' responses on the, exploratory, modified relational-interdependent self-construal scale and their temporal distance conditions on anticipated comfort during support provision.

Discussion

Overall, regardless of temporal distance, the type of support participants preferred to provide to their significant other while she or he prepared a stressful speech did influence their anticipated subjective experience during an upcoming support provision interaction in which they would provide support to their significant other while he or she prepared a stressful speech. Participants who actually preferred to provide emotion-focused support to their close other in this specific situation, anticipated feeling more comfort if asked to do so in the upcoming interaction. Interestingly, participants' support preference to provide problem-focused support in this situation did not influence their anticipated comfort if they were asked to provide this type of support in the upcoming interaction. In these analyses involving participants' specific support preferences within the specific speech preparation context, temporal distance was found to increase participants' overall anticipated comfort levels when providing both emotion-focused and problem-focused support. In both anticipated instances, participants believed that they would experience more positive emotions in distant-future support provision interactions compared to near-future interactions, illustrating that the difficulty associated with a usually stressful event (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979) was somewhat minimized, or discounted, when individuals were thinking about it as occurring in the future (cf. Liberman & Trope, 1998).

Whereas main effects of specific support preferences and temporal distance were observed in analyses involving participants' support preferences specific to the speech-preparation situation, it was important to broaden the scope and examine how participants' general tendencies to provide their partner with support influenced their subjective expectations for upcoming social support interactions. The general support tendencies of participants, with regard to providing their significant others with support when he or she is coping with real-life negative events and stressful situations, interacted with their temporal distance condition to influence their anticipated subjective experiences during the upcoming interaction. Participants thinking about this interaction as occurring in the distant-future, compared to the near-future, anticipated experiencing greater comfort and positive emotions during support provision, regardless of the type of support they were asked to provide. Perhaps these individuals associated their specific supportive actions toward their significant other in this upcoming experiment with achieving their ideal desire to perceive themselves as a supportive and helpful

relationship partner (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Shavelson et al., 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). Maximizing one's potential and approximating one's ideal self might allow individuals to look at this support-provision experience more positively and thus anticipate experiencing more comfort and positive feelings during a stressful interaction because one is doing something that is of value to not only one's significant other, but also to one's ideal self. A similar effect was found involving relationship commitment. Participants' feelings of commitment to their current relationship were associated positively with their expectation to feel more comfort when providing their significant other with support in the distal-future interaction but not the proximal-future interaction. Accordingly, participants considering the distal-future interaction may have considered it an opportunity to live up to their important relationship commitments.

Counter to predictions, no significant difference between the temporal distance manipulation conditions (*near-future* and *distant-future*) was found on a stable measure of level of action construal (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989). Further, no significant differences were found on private self-consciousness and self-esteem across temporal distance manipulation conditions. As reported above, however, results from this experiment do appear to suggest that participants in the distal-future condition focused more on the self, as indicated by the greater association among relationship self-reflection measures (i.e., measures assessing to what degree participants include relationship partners in the self and feel that their current relationship has helped them in the approximation of their ideal self) and positive subjective experiences anticipated in the upcoming support interaction. For participants in the distant-future temporal distance condition, having a higher relational-interdependent self-construal (i.e, believing more strongly that their close relationships importantly reflect who they are as people) and holding a stronger belief that the current relationship has been beneficial to one's ideal self (i.e., enabled them to accomplish new things, expand their capabilities in life, and have a larger perspective on things) was associated with anticipating more comfort during support provision . The association between these self-reflection measures and anticipated feelings of comfort in support provision in the upcoming experiment were more salient to those in the distant-future condition. When participants in the distant future condition were able to reflect on the benefits their current relationship provided for them in terms of approximating their ideal selves, they felt more comfortable providing support to their significant other because such support provision actions were associated with the more abstract purpose of maintaining one's relationship and achieving one's ideals.

General Discussion

Living up to one's ideal self-concepts arguably can be considered the most abstract purpose we all have (Carver & Scheier, 1999; Shavelson et al., 1976; Shavelson & Bolus, 1982). Individuals continually strive to attain a desirable sense of self by making sure that their daily actions are in accordance with the attributes, values, and goals that they deem ideal (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Higgins, 1987; Shah & Higgins,

2001). These daily opportunities to self-express ideals are evident in the people we choose as peers and significant others (Cialdini et al., 1976; Tajfel, 1972, 1974). Context greatly influences the salience of these choices as expressions of the ideal self, however. Numerous phenomena impact how individuals think about tasks, decisions, and actions; making some pieces of information more or less relevant during evaluation and outcome (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Sperber, Cara, & Vittorio, 1995; Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Kim & Drolet, 2003; Mandel, 2003). In the current experiments, level of action construal (i.e., narrowing versus broadening one's construal of action categories), a factor that has thus far received little attention in relationship research, was hypothesized to influence the pertinence of individuals' own ideal self-views (i.e., goals, traits, preferences) to their choices of peers, as well as their anticipated subjective experience while providing social support to significant others.

Specifically, the present work tested whether thinking about events at increased temporal distance, and thus construing action in abstract, purpose-oriented terms, would increase participants' tendency to link their specific actions to their abstract purposes and ask themselves, "What do my relationship choices say about me?" and "What does the type of support I provide and deem appropriate say about me?" This self-reflection was expected to be absent for participants thinking concretely (i.e., thinking about events occurring currently or in the proximal-future); in this more process-driven mindset, actions and decisions were expected to be viewed as compartmentalized, and therefore less representative of the self. Data from four experiments provided some support for these hypotheses.

In these four experiments, temporal distance influenced how the salience of individuals' own ideal goals, traits, values, and preferences impacted their feelings of positivity and attraction toward various targets, as well as their subjective experiences and evaluations of support-provision situations. Participants thinking about events at increased temporal distance were more attracted to and felt more positively toward individuals emulating their own ideals (Experiments 1 and 3), viewed support as more appropriate when in accordance with their ideal support preferences (Experiment 2), and associated their anticipated comfort and emotions expected during an upcoming support provision interaction involving a close other more strongly with their overall support provision preferences (Experiment 4). While cohering with previous findings in the domains of level of construal and self-concept, these findings suggest potentially interesting implications for relationship processes and choices, as well as social support provision among close others, as elaborated below.

Implications for Choice of and Attraction to Relationship Partners

Relationship theorists have posited that we are attracted not only to a relationship partner's similarity to our actual self but also to that relationship partner's similarity to our ideal self (Klohnen & Luo, 2003; LaPrelle et al., 1990). Our attraction to a potential relationship partner thus increases as we perceive him or her as approximating the type of person we strive to become (Herbst et al., 2003). The current research found that this desire and this attraction becomes stronger as individuals construe such choices as reflections of their ideals, even when these choices are for distal representatives of the self (i.e., a peer representative in a student organization), as opposed to more proximal representations of the self (i.e., a romantic relationship partner). Whereas, overall, we know it is important for most individuals to choose relationship partners approximating

their ideals, it would be interesting to assess, in future research, how level of construal impacts the pertinence of a variety of idealized traits, goals, and values that individuals find important, to their feelings of initial attraction for a potential relationship partner. Previous research shows that our most basic of actions (i.e., wearing certain clothes or buying certain consumer brands) represent the attributes and goals that we deem ideal (see James, 1890; Aaker, 1997; Aaker, 1999; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), and from the current research we know that a more abstract perspective increases the relevance of seemingly context-irrelevant ideals in certain choices (i.e., seeing someone who shares your own desire to exercise as the best candidate for a student psychological organization). It would be interesting to see if seemingly context-irrelevant factors in initial romantic attraction, such as the attraction target's viewpoints on things like global warming, vegetarianism, and purchasing free trade coffee, increase in influence on feelings of attraction, when individuals are thinking at a higher level of construal.

Besides examining how level of construal impacts attraction to potential romantic relationship partners, more research is warranted on how a more abstract construal level impacts attraction to interaction partners in various contexts. In the current research, predicted findings were not observed in regards to how level of construal impacted the choice of a peer with whom to interact. As noted above, there are several proposed reason for why this may have occurred. Perhaps, participants proactively tried to minimize their own anticipated discomfort in the role of support provider (Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979) by selecting the partner who they thought would be the most competent in the given context. Or, as research on upward social comparison in the context of close relationships might suggest, as interactions become more intimate, feelings of blasting, rather than basking may occur if individuals feel threatened by the domains in which other individuals excel (Tesser, Miller, & Moore, 1998; Herbst et al., 2003); thus resulting in distancing effects. Perhaps this is why female participants did not want to interact with a fellow female who loved to work out and who they, most likely, envisioned as being rather physically fit. Further research would need to tease apart in what contexts level of construal promotes approximating the ideal self by basking in the other's reflected glory versus feeling as though the other's accomplishments are a reminder of one's own shortcomings in approximating the ideal self (i.e., thus resulting in the desire to distance oneself from the accomplished target).

Implications for Social Support Provision

Support provision can be an extremely intense and overwhelming experience for support providers (see Silver et al., 1990; Wortman & Dunkel-Schetter, 1979); therefore many support recipients receive discordant and inappropriate forms of support from those close to them. The affective experiences of support recipients during support interactions have been largely studied (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Hong et al., 2005), however research has been rather sparse on the affective experiences of support providers during their offerings of support. The current research was able to identify several factors that increase individuals' anticipated comfort and positive experiences expected during provision of support to close others. General support provision desires (i.e., how often they usually provide support to their significant other) became more salient and important to feelings of positive affective experiences for participants thinking more broadly. Perhaps a higher level of construal enabled support providers to

see that they have offered support in the past (i.e., this is something they can do), and that doing so helped them actualize their ideals of being a supportive relationship partner; therefore they anticipate feeling comfortable during upcoming support provision, and once again actualizing their ideals. In addition, when thinking more abstractly, participants' feelings of commitment to the relationship and feeling that the relationship adds a lot to the self (i.e., helps them be the most ideal person they can be) became more pertinent to their expectations of feeling more comfort and positive emotions during upcoming support provision. For participants thinking at a more abstract level of construal, support provision may have been construed as a positive opportunity to actualize their ideal self-perceptions as a committed relationship partner, as well as remind themselves of all of the benefits they acquire from this relationship; thus positive emotions and comfort were associated with such an experience.

These finding have important implications for social-support interventions among romantic partners. Many extant support-enhancing interventions focus a significant amount of time working on increasing support recipients' own coping techniques (i.e, levels of mastery, self-esteem, self-presentation; Cutrona et al., 1997; Silver et al., 1990) and altering any unrealistic expectations that they may hold about the type of support they will receive (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1990). Although there are clear benefits to enhancing support recipients' own coping mechanisms and self-presentations, receiving positive social support from close others is also an important part of the coping process that should not be ignored. The current research suggests that increasing support providers' levels of action construal impacts the salience of how important their relationship is to them (i.e., how committed they are, how much they gain from the relationship), which results in viewing support provision as less aversive, and, perhaps, something that needs to be done to live up to their own relationship ideals. Future research needs to be conducted, however, to see how these anticipated positive emotions and comfort associated with support provision actually translate into the type of support and concordance of the support individuals provide to their significant others in support situations.

Limitations

In Experiments 2 – 4, the lack of consistent differences across temporal-distance conditions on the level of construal manipulation check suggests that further work is needed to examine the context-specificity and durability of impacts of temporal distance on general levels of action construal. Whereas hypothesized differences were found in Experiment 3, none where found in Experiments 2 and 4 (no level of construal manipulation check was included in Experiment 1). Cognitive interference, from other measures, clouding the maintenance of the level of construal manipulation assessed at the very end of these experiments is quite plausible (Allport et al., 1994; Allport & Wylie, 1999). A way to remedy this in future research would be to move the manipulation check up in sequence, so that it is completed directly after the manipulation occurs. Further, a more sensitive measure of differences across level of construal conditions could be used, like assessing the level of linguistic abstractness in written responses across manipulation conditions (Linguistic Category Model; LCM; Semin & Fiedler, 1988, 1991; Semin, 2000). The LCM model asserts that individuals thinking at a higher level of construal use more abstract language in their descriptions of individuals and events, than those thinking at a lower level of construal.

Further, no expected differences across manipulation conditions were found on measures of private self-consciousness and self-esteem, as initially proposed. It was expected that if the level of construal manipulation was effective, individuals thinking more abstractly would exhibit more self-focus on such measures; however, now retrospectively, it appears that these chosen measures were not the most sensitive to use to pick up this proposed mechanism (i.e., relating specific actions to one's overall abstract purpose of approximating the ideal self). Some items in the assessment of private self-consciousness seem relevant (i.e., "I reflect about myself a lot"), whereas others do not (i.e., "I'm often the subject of my own fantasies."). Better support for the proposed mechanism was found, however, in Experiment 4, with participants in the distal-future condition focusing more on the self, as indicated by the greater association among relationship self-reflection measures (i.e., measures assessing to what degree participants include relationship partners in the self and feel that their current relationship has helped them in the approximation of their ideal self) and positive subjective experiences anticipated in the upcoming support interaction. Individuals reflecting on the benefits their current relationship provided for them in terms of approximating their ideal selves were more comfortable providing support to their significant other, because such support provision actions were associated with the more abstract purpose of maintaining one's relationship and achieving one's ideals.

Conclusion

It appears that the way we conceptualize the actions involved in the processes of attraction and social-support provision (i.e., from an abstract, purpose-oriented perspective or a concrete, process-oriented perspective) impacts whom we desire to be associated with and our anticipated affective experiences during support provision to such individuals. Thinking more abstractly, as opposed to more concretely, apparently primes us to link our specific actions pertaining to relationship choices and social support provision to our overall abstract purpose of actualizing and maintaining our ideal self-concept. It appears, then, that depending on our mental mindset, whom we choose to associate with, and our preferences and feelings toward social support provision, become means of self-expression, similar to the products we choose to buy and the political choices we make. They all say something about the type of person we are ideally striving to become.

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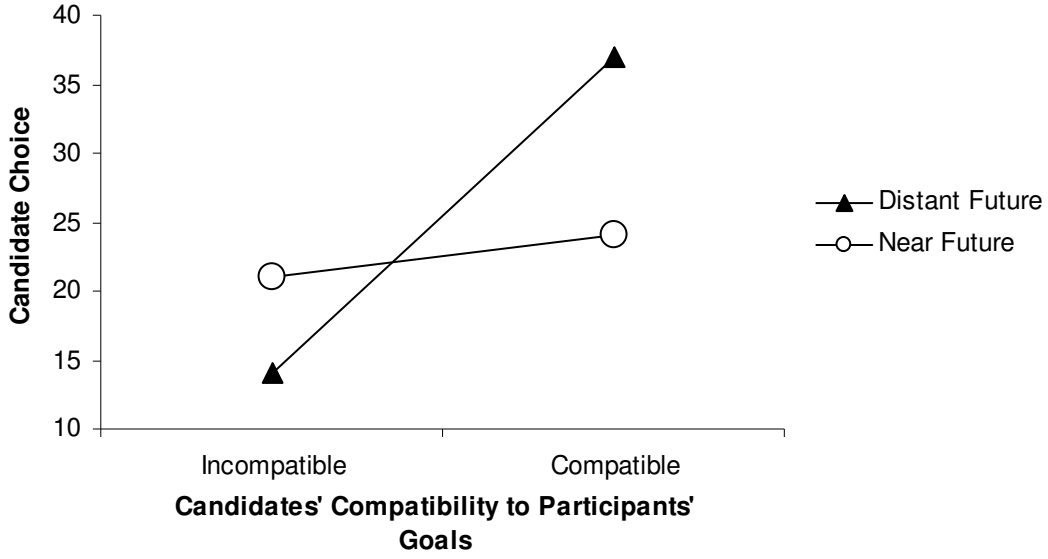

Figure 1. Frequencies of selections of student candidates (to take office in near or distant future) described as behaving compatibly or incompatibly with participants' own accessible goals (Experiment 1).

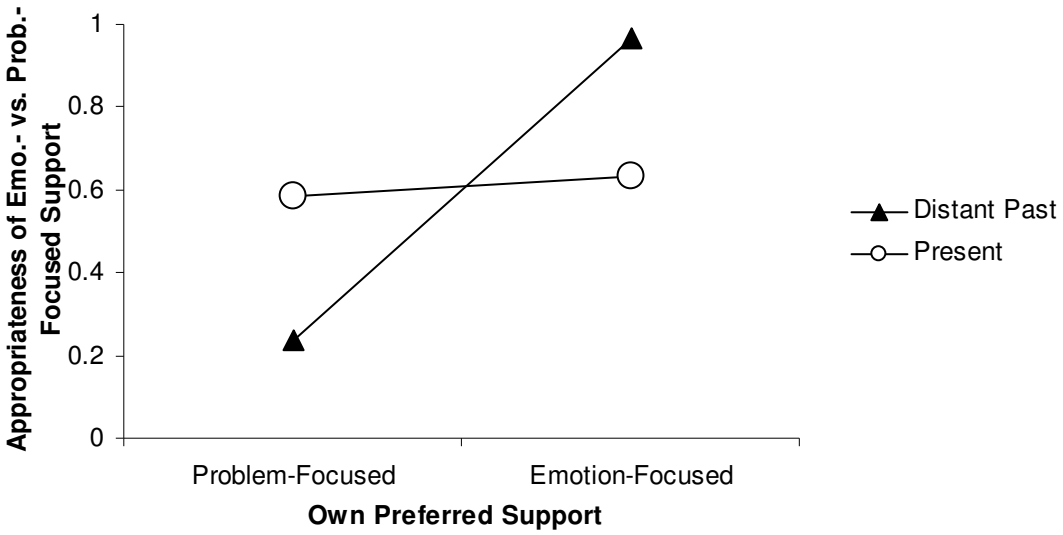

Figure 2. Mean differences in perceived appropriateness of providing emotion- versus problem-focused support, expressed as a function of temporal distance and self-preferences for emotion- versus problem-focused support (Experiment 2).

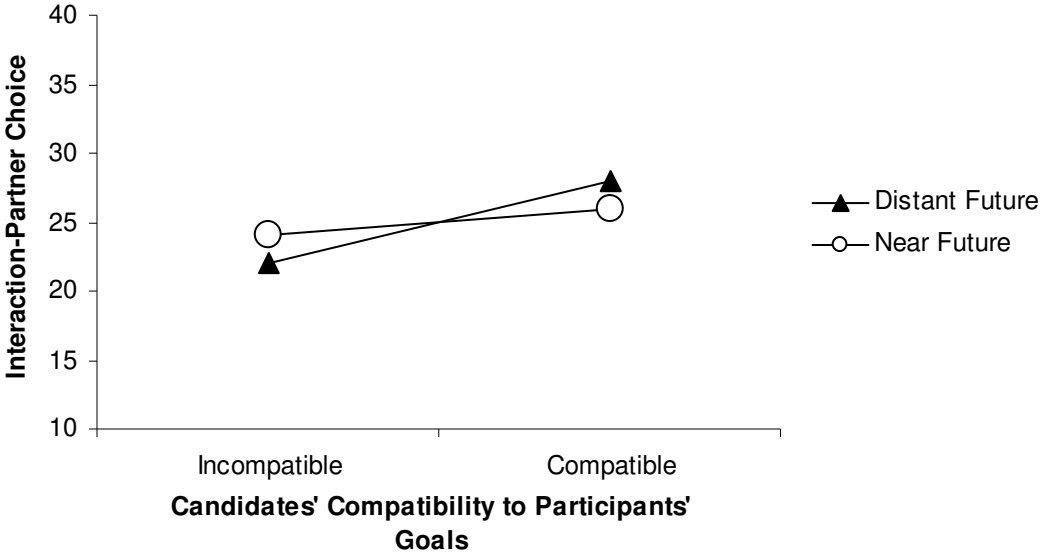

Figure 3. Frequencies of selections of interaction partners (for interaction in near or distant future) described as behaving compatibly or incompatibly with participants' own accessible goals (Experiment 3).

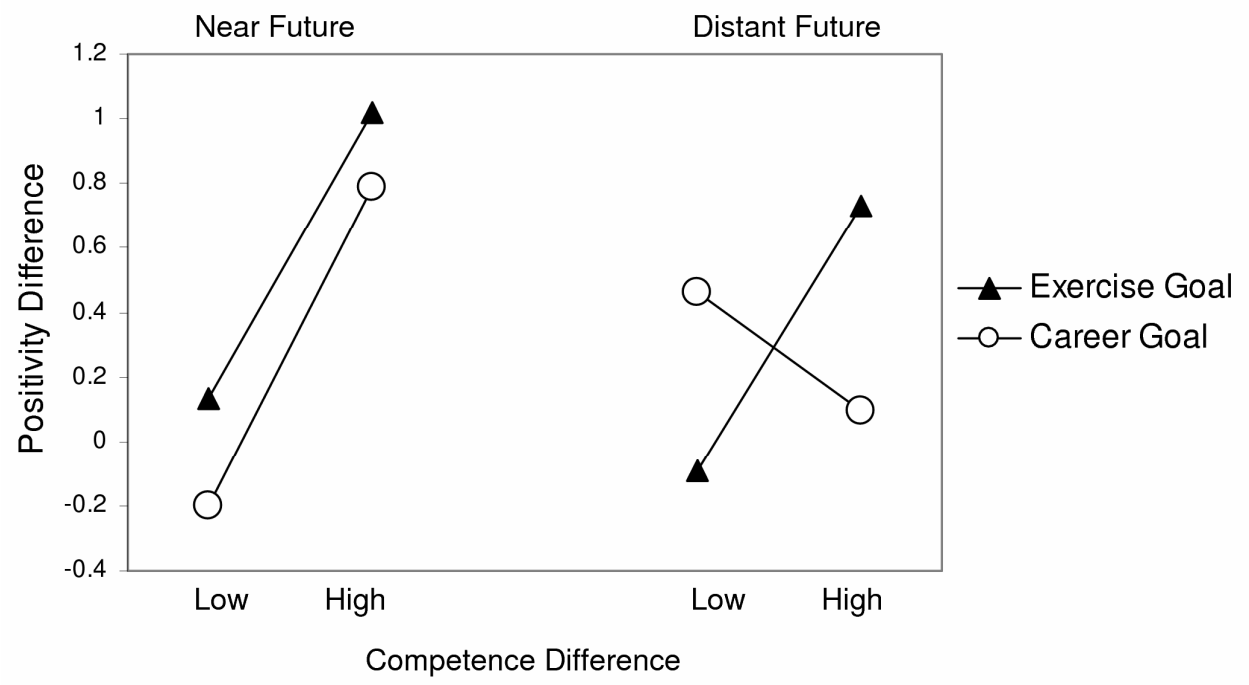

Figure 4. Differential positivity ratings of potential interaction partners, expressed as a function of the interaction between participants' goal assignment and differential competence ratings of potential interaction partners (Experiment 3).

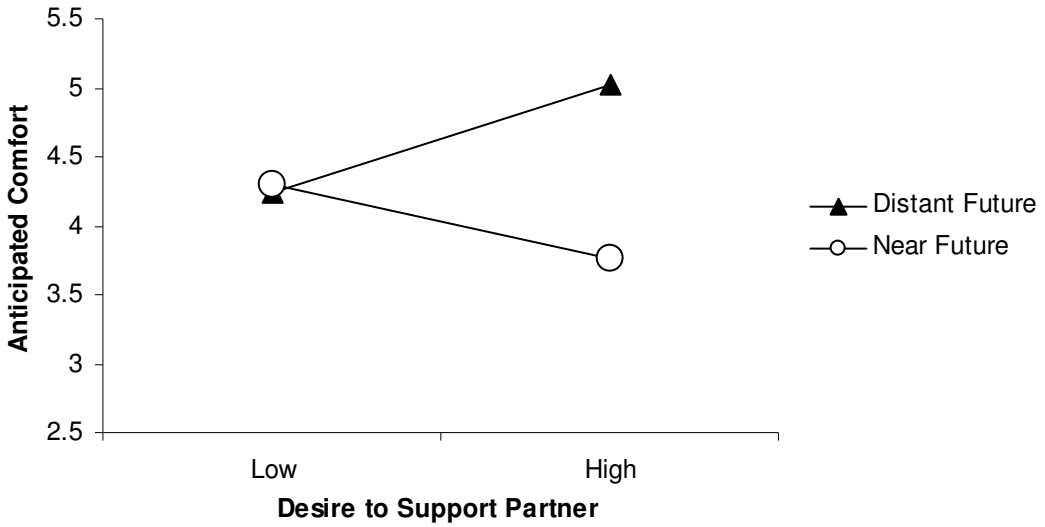

Figure 5. Anticipated comfort while providing support to partner, expressed as a function of desire to provide support to partner and temporal distance to event (Experiment 4).

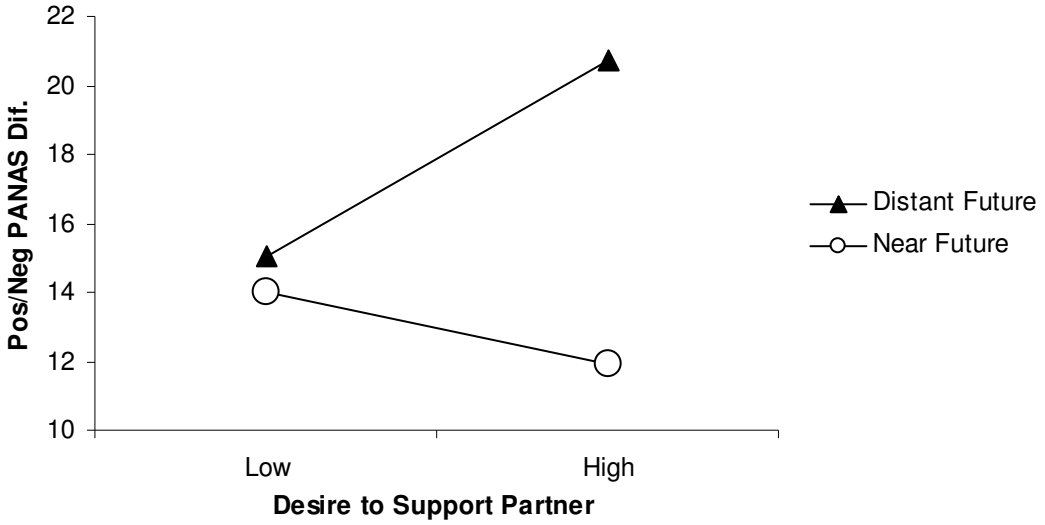

Figure 6. Anticipated positive versus negative affect (PANAS items) while providing support to partner, expressed as a function of desire to provide support to partner and temporal distance to event (Experiment 4).

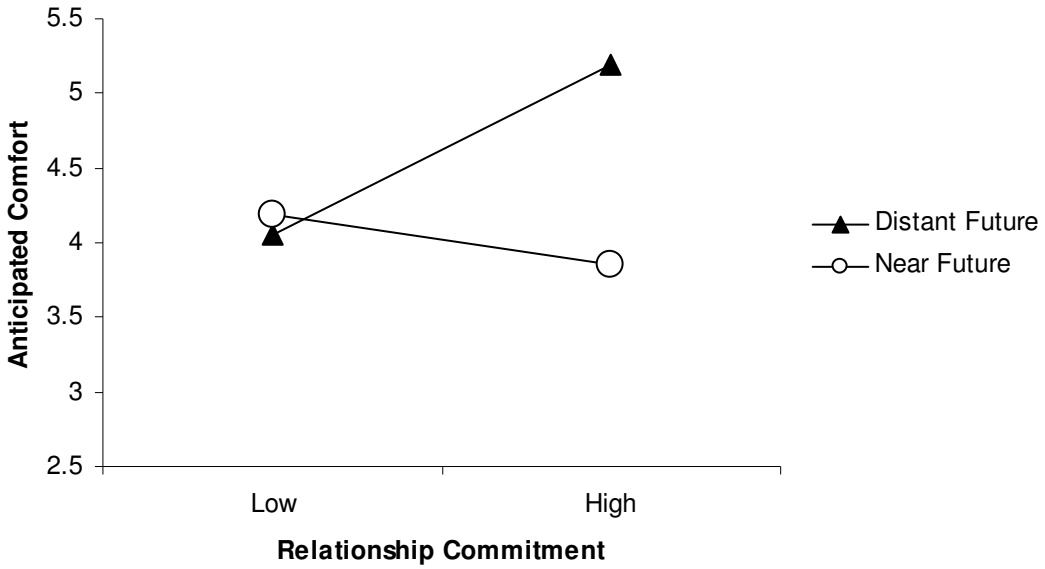

Figure 7. Anticipated comfort while providing support to partner, expressed as a function of relationship commitment and temporal distance to event (Experiment 4).

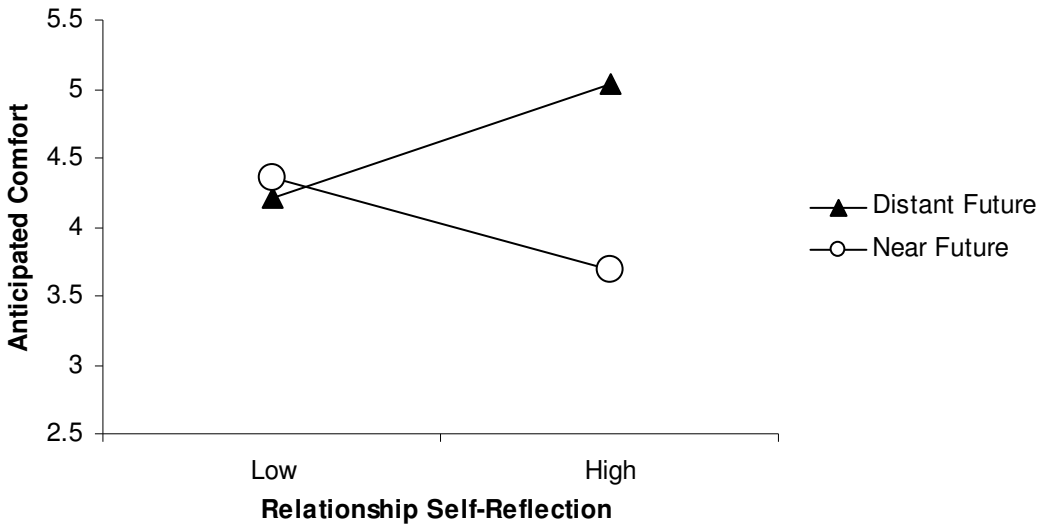

Figure 8. Anticipated comfort while providing support to partner, expressed as a function of relationship self-reflection and temporal distance to event (Experiment 4).

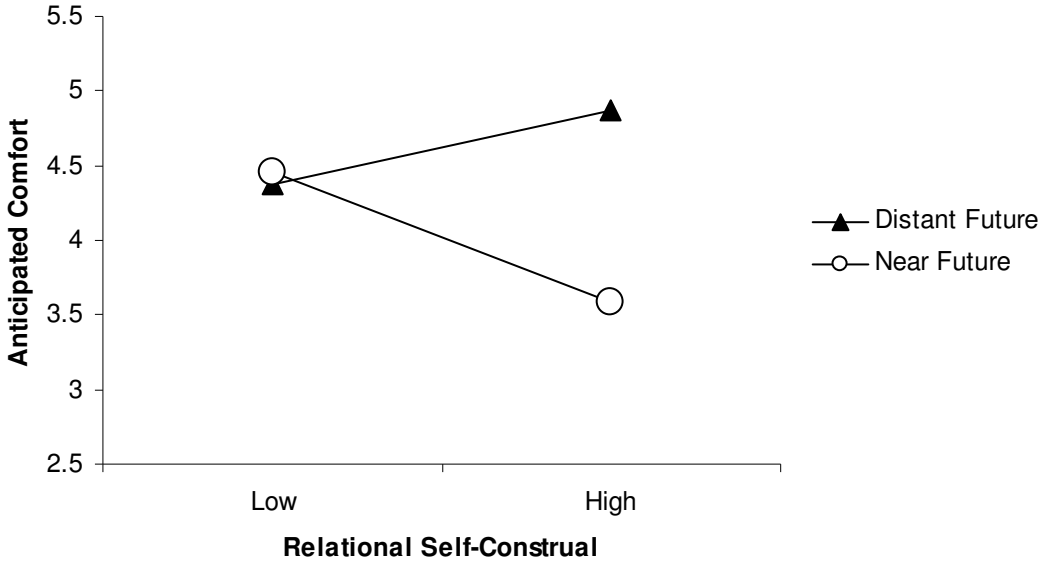

Figure 9. Anticipated comfort while providing support to partner, expressed as a function of relational interdependent self-construal and temporal distance to event (Experiment 4).

Appendix A

Condition 1 (Current):

Events Today

Please imagine that the following interactions take place TODAY, RIGHT NOW.

When reading and answering questions about these interactions, please imagine that they occur today, among current Stony Brook University students.

Vignette 1

This afternoon, Donald advises his friend David that the best way to get over his recent breakup is to go out to bars and parties to take his mind off of things and meet new girls.

David would rather sort out his thoughts and feelings about the breakup, but Donald persists in suggesting he go out and give it a try.

1. How appropriate is the help Donald provides to David today?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all appropriate				Extremely appropriate

2. Do you think Donald's support is the right type to provide in the situation today?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely

Vignette 2

This afternoon, Stephan sympathizes with his friend Simon after his recent breakup and encourages him to talk about his thoughts and feelings about the breakup.

Simon would rather Stephan give him advice about how he gets over breakups, but Stephan persists in suggesting he talk abut his own thoughts and feelings.

1. How appropriate is the help Stephan provides to Simon today?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all appropriate				Extremely appropriate

2. Do you think Stephan's support is the right type to provide in the situation today?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely

Condition 2 (Past):

Events in the Distant Past

Please imagine that the following interactions took place in the DISTANT PAST.

When reading and answering questions about these interactions, please imagine that they occurred around 15 years ago, among a group of Stony Brook University students that are now long gone.

Vignette 1

Fifteen years ago, Donald advised his friend David that the best way to get over his breakup was to go out to bars and parties to take his mind off of things and meet new girls.

David would have rather sorted out his thoughts and feelings about the breakup, but Donald persisted in suggesting he go out and give it a try.

1. How appropriate was the help Donald provided to David 15 years ago?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all appropriate				Extremely appropriate

2. Do you think Donald's support was the right type for the situation 15 years ago?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely

Vignette 2

Fifteen years ago, Stephan sympathized with his friend Simon after his breakup and encouraged him to talk about his thoughts and feelings about the breakup.

Simon would have rather Stephan had given him advice on how he got over breakups, but Stephan persisted in suggesting he talk abut his own thoughts and feelings.

1. How appropriate was the help Stephan provided to Simon 15 years ago?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all appropriate				Extremely appropriate

2. Do you think Stephan's support was the right type for the situation 15 years ago?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely