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Don't Get Too Close, It Hurts: Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self and Biased Evaluations of Romantic Partners and Their Behaviors

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DON'T GET TOO CLOSE, IT HURTS: INCLUSION-OF-OTHER-IN-THE-SELF AND

BIASED EVALUATIONS OF ROMANTIC PARTNERS AND THEIR BEHAVIORS

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2024

Dedication

In the loving memory of my mother, Norma Patricia Ceniceros, whose strength and creativity will always inspire me.

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE, IT HURTS: INCLUSION-OF-OTHER-IN-THE-SELF AND

BIASED EVALUATIONS OF ROMANTIC PARTNERS AND THEIR BEHAVIORS

by

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Abstract

This investigation tested how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (IOS) – the experience of closeness as overlapping selves – increases maladaptive biases toward romantic partners and their behaviors. Study 1 tested how the level of IOS is associated with disregarding signs that indicate that a romantic partner might be unhealthy for one's emotional and physical well-being. Participants who were single (N = 77) reviewed four online dating profiles. Each profile was created to elicit high or low IOS and reveal a transgression committed by the potential romantic partner. Then, participants evaluated the potential romantic partner in suitability and the transgression on negativity. Study 2 conceptually replicated Study 1 and extended these findings by testing how the level of IOS is associated with sharing guilt for the transgressions committed by one's romantic partner. Participants in romantic relationships (N = 112) recalled the most recent transgression committed by their romantic partner. Then, participants evaluated their romantic partner in suitability, evaluated the transgression on negativity, and rated the extent to which they shared guilt for the transgression committed by their romantic partner. In both studies, self-complexity was tested as a protective factor, and anxious attachment was tested as a risk factor. Both studies confirmed that higher IOS influenced the evaluation of romantic partners to be more positive. However, there was mixed support that IOS influences the evaluations of transgressions committed by romantic partners to be less negative, and no support that it influences the experience of shared guilt for the transgressions committed by romantic partners. Lastly, self-complexity and anxious attachment did not moderate the association between IOS and these biases, indicating no protective or risk effects. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self, Self-Complexity, Anxious Attachment

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Being close to a romantic partner has numerous advantages for a romantic relationship. However, the disadvantages of being too close to a romantic partner – especially a negative romantic partner – have been overlooked in the academic discourse related to romantic relationships. While the experience of closeness with a romantic partner can promote healthy relationships, it can also foster unhealthy and even abusive romantic relationships. This investigation tested the adverse relationship outcomes of a unique way of experiencing closeness (i.e., inclusion-of-other-in-the-self) and tested variables that were predicted to decrease or increase these outcomes.

Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self

Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is an overlap in identities that occurs when two people share a deep connection (Aron et al., 1992). Through an overlap in identities, romantic partners become an extension of each other and share their resources, perspectives, and characteristics (Aron et al., 1992). Resources refer to material (e.g., money) and non-material (e.g., knowledge, social status) things, and the perceived access to these resources increases with the level of inclusion (Aron et al., 2004). Perspectives refer to the different ways of experiencing objects or events, and the likelihood of sharing a close other's point of view (or vice versa) increases with the level of inclusion (Aron et al., 2004). Lastly, characteristics refer to the traits or memories associated with the self, and the indistinguishability between one's and a close other's traits or memories increases with the level of inclusion (Aron et al., 2004). The incorporation of each of these aspects in the self can influence one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors toward a romantic partner and/or a romantic relationship.

The Advantages of Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self

Inclusion-of other-in-the-self is important for the success of romantic relationships in multiple ways. First, people who include their romantic partners in their self-concept engage in behaviors conducive to a satisfactory relationship. Overall, higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self serves as a motivation to maintain and commit to a romantic relationship. Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self predicts greater relationship maintenance behaviors (Ledbetter et al., 2010), greater forgiveness of offenses (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008), greater sexual well-being (Pietras & Briken, 2021), a lower likelihood of infidelity (Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006), and a lower likelihood of dissolution (Le et al., 2010). Second, including close others in one's self-concept increases one's self-growth. Self-expansion is a byproduct of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self as self-expansion can be achieved by including the resources, perspectives, and characteristics of close others. Overall, romantic relationships that provide room for growth are more satisfactory, and consequently, people are more likely to protect those relationships. Higher self-expansion predicts increases in greater sexual desire (Muise et al., 2019), greater commitment (Hughes et al., 2022), greater relationship excitement (Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Hughes et al., 2022), and a lower likelihood of infidelity (Lewandoski & Ackerman., 2006; VanderDrift et al., 2011). Third, romantic relationships thrive in having a shared identity. Overall, this shared identity creates an expectation of shared fate (i.e., anticipation that what is associated with a romantic partner is associated with oneself and vice versa) and buffers relationship conflicts. A shared identity predicts greater maintenance of positive global partner perceptions (Thai & Lockwood, 2015) and constructive coping responses to relationship conflict (Walsh & Neff, 2018), whereas a shared fate predicts better affective responses to social comparisons between romantic partners (Pinkus et al., 2012), greater relationship quality

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expected (Cloutier & Peetz, 2017), and better satisfaction resulting from an awareness of individual goals (Riediger & Rauers, 2010). This body of research demonstrates that feeling close to a romantic partner generally encourages thoughts and behaviors conducive to a healthy relationship. The experience of closeness, however, does not always result in the reaping of positive outcomes.

The Disadvantages of Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self

Although inclusion-of-other-in-the-self has numerous benefits for a relationship, the high inclusion of a romantic partner can also be detrimental. When there is high inclusion of a romantic partner, for instance, the loss of that romantic partner is particularly painful. In breakups, higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is related to greater nostalgia for an ex-partner, and it is harder to accept the end of the relationship (Boelen & van den Hout, 2010). Further, during a breakup, people feel a sense of loss of self especially if the relationship provided room for self-growth (Lewandoski et al., 2006). Similarly, the high inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a recently deceased loved one predicts prolonged grief disorder (Harrison et al., 2022). Romantic partners may also differ in the desired inclusion level, which consequently creates conflict in a romantic relationship. Some people, in particular, desire less closeness in their romantic relationships because their current level of closeness threatens their identity (Mashek & Sherman, 2004). In general, higher discrepancies in the level of desired closeness and actual closeness in a romantic relationship result in poor relationship outcomes (Frost & Forrester, 2013; Frost et al., 2017).

Few studies have been conducted to test if and how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self has the potential to result in unhealthy or abusive romantic relationships. One study demonstrated that in cultures of honor (i.e., where one's reputation is maintained by earning the respect of others,

often using violence), inclusion-of-other-in-the-self predicts being aggressive toward a romantic partner (Benavidez et al., 2016). Although it is important to continue exploring how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self can predict the perpetration of aggression toward a romantic partner, the focus of the current investigation is to set the groundwork to investigate how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self may increase the risk of victimization of aggression, specifically through the biased perceptions of a romantic partner and their behaviors.

Biased Evaluations of Romantic Partners

People have biases that increase the likelihood of evaluating a romantic partner more favorably, even when the romantic partner is not a good romantic partner. For instance, higher relationship identification (i.e., the extent to which the relationship is incorporated into the self) predicts having positive global perceptions of romantic partners regardless of experiencing numerous transgressions from them (Auger et al., 2017). Similar concepts to inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, such as commitment, also predict some of these biases. Specifically, people highly committed to their romantic partners are less threatened by receiving negative information about their romantic partners (Arriaga et al., 2007). Unpublished data from our laboratory also indicate that people hold more positive evaluations of potential romantic partners when there is higher (vs. lower) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, even when it is known that the potential romantic partner has behaved aggressively (e.g., physical abuse) toward a past romantic partner. These findings are unique in indicating that these biases are still present even when the negative behaviors and/or traits associated with the romantic partner are more severe in comparison to the minor transgressions (e.g., interrupting the participant's joke) that have been studied by other researchers (Auger et al., 2017).

Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self suggests reciprocity between romantic partners. It involves incorporating a romantic partner's resources, perspectives, and characteristics into one's identity while also *extending* one's own resources, perspectives, and characteristics to the romantic partner. The tendency to seek a positive self-image is engrained in human nature and leads to various self-biases. Consequently, through inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, these self-biases are likely to be extended to romantic partners to protect one's self-presentation, which now involves their romantic partner and relationship. Therefore, as long as a romantic partner is integrated into one's identity, a person's ability to evaluate the romantic partner accurately and critically will be hindered.

Biased Evaluations of Romantic Partners' Behaviors

People also have biases that increase the likelihood of evaluating a romantic partner's characteristics or behaviors more favorably. For instance, people minimize the importance of attractiveness and relationship skills (i.e., responsiveness) that their romantic partners lack to protect their overall perception of their romantic partner (Thai & Lockwood, 2015). Further, highly committed individuals tend to exhibit a higher tolerance for partner aggression and are more likely to forgive their romantic partners after a transgression (Arriaga et al., 2018; Molden & Finkel, 2010). This may be due to highly committed individuals reinterpreting their partner's aggressive behaviors, such as name-calling or belittling, as more acceptable (Arriaga et al., 2016). Even instances of physical violence by a romantic partner are dismissed as playful behavior by highly committed people (Arriaga et al., 2002). Unpublished data from our laboratory also indicate that a potential romantic partner's transgressions (e.g., physical abuse) are perceived to be less negative when there is higher (vs. lower) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self. Further, prior studies demonstrate that people feel more guilty for the wrongdoings of someone

they feel higher (vs. lower) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self because closeness increases one's perception of behavioral control over the actions of others (Chen et al., 2018). Similarly, greater commitment to a romantic partner encourages rationalizing a romantic partner's betrayal, such as by seeking external causes or taking responsibility for the transgression that occurred (Finkel et al., 2002). Highly committed individuals are also more likely to underestimate how destructive their romantic partners can be (Venaglia & Lemay, 2019). Unpublished data from our laboratory also indicate that people share greater guilt for their romantic partner's transgressions (e.g., being racist) when there is higher (vs. lower) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, regardless of not having an active role in the transgression. These findings are unique in indicating that people go beyond ignoring the negative behaviors their romantic partners engage in and that people change their perceptions of the negative behaviors as well, possibly through feelings of shared responsibility.

Maintaining a positive self-image involves more than thinking highly of oneself. It is inevitable for people to make mistakes or eventually engage in misdeeds. When these occur, they are rationalized or minimized to prevent them from undermining one's self-image. This specific self-bias is expected to be extended to a romantic partner through inclusion-of-other-in-the-self. Therefore, as long as a romantic partner is integrated into one's identity, their negative traits and actions are likely to be overlooked, potentially prolonging a person's exposure to harmful behaviors and dynamics.

Measurement of Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self

Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is typically assessed using a one-item measure that depicts seven pairs of circles that differ in the degree of overlap (Aron et al., 1992). Participants are asked to select the set of overlapping circles that best represent their relationship with a close other. The greater the overlap between the circles, the greater the inclusion between one and a

close other. This measure has been effectively used by numerous researchers since its development. Its popularity is mainly due to its length and ease of implementation. Most researchers opt to assess rather than manipulate inclusion-of-other-in-the-self. Being able to manipulate inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, however, can allow for the test of new, complex research questions.

The interpersonal closeness generating task is one way in which inclusion-of-other-in-the self is effectively manipulated. This task is meant to generate interpersonal closeness by having two strangers paired and asked to share their responses to questions that increase in the level of required self-disclosure over a 45-minute session (Aron et al., 1997). In this task, higher self-disclosure results in a greater experience of interpersonal closeness (i.e., inclusion-of-other-in-the-self). This task has been successfully employed by other researchers to generate closeness in previously unacquainted people, and then use this closeness to predict relationship-related variables (e.g., attraction, continued interaction; Sprecher & Treger, 2015; Slatcher, 2010). Although this manipulation is effective, it requires the recruitment of dyads and a large time commitment. Therefore, I modified this task to be easier to implement and allow the addition of other manipulations or measures of interest. More details are discussed in the method section.

Some characteristics or qualities about a person can affect how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is experienced with a close other. Specifically, these characteristics or qualities can influence the level of inclusion of a close other or the importance given to any one relationship. Therefore, it is also important to consider these characteristics or qualities and their role in decreasing or increasing inclusion-of-other-in-the-self outcomes. Of particular interest for this investigation are self-complexity and anxious attachment.

Self-Complexity

One theoretical model used to understand the structure of the self-concept is self-complexity. This model was developed to explain emotional variability in the face of different life events (Linville, 1985). Self-complexity refers to one's knowledge and organization of the self-concept. One's level of self-complexity is the combination of the number of self-aspects (i.e., identities) and the overlap between self-aspects. Self-aspects can be roles, relationships, contexts, temporal states, and goals (McConnell, 2011). Each self-aspect is composed of a group of attributes (e.g., traits, behaviors), and the overlap between the self-aspects is defined by the number of repeated attributes used to describe each self-aspect (McConnell, 2011). Individual differences exist in the level of self-complexity that people have, and variability in this is used to predict how people deal with various life events.

Self-Complexity and Life Events

People's level of self-complexity can be used to predict how they will react to life events. Consider a woman with high self-complexity and a woman with low self-complexity (See Figure 1). These women share the self-aspects of researcher, student, mentor, and daughter. For both, there is an overlap in the attributes (e.g., smart, organized) used to describe the self-aspects of researcher, student, and mentor. However, the woman on the left has seven additional self-aspects, whereas the woman on the right has only one additional self-aspect. Let's assume that both women had a manuscript rejected by a scientific journal. Using the self-complexity model, we can predict that the woman with higher self-complexity will be able to better manage rejection than the woman with low self-complexity. Both women will experience a spillover effect to the same extent. The spillover effect occurs when a self-aspect is activated (e.g., researcher), new attributions are made based on recent life events (e.g., feeling like a failure for

being rejected), and then spread to closely associated self-aspects (e.g., student, mentor; Linville, 1987). The impact of the spillover effect, however, will be different for these women. According to the affective extremity hypothesis, people low in self-complexity are more sensitive to life events and consequently feel more extreme about them. Specifically, people with low self-complexity experience more negative affect when a negative life event occurs and more positive affect when a positive life event occurs (Linville, 1987; McConnell et al., 2009). The spillover effect and affective extremity are greater for people with low self-complexity (vs. high self-complexity) because they don't have as many other self-aspects to buffer the impact on the overall self-concept. In our example, the woman on the left has other self-aspects with unique attributes (e.g., strong, loving, creative) that can buffer the feelings of rejection. This is an example of the self-complexity buffer hypothesis, which posits that higher self-complexity moderates the impact of stressful events (Linville, 1987). It seems that having a higher number of self-aspects decreases the importance of any one self-aspect. People have an idea of their level of self-complexity because the organization of their self-concept depends on self-awareness and self-knowledge. People may use this information to infer how they would feel and/or react to specific life events and then use this information to make life decisions such as staying or leaving a romantic relationship.

High Self-Complexity

Researcher — Student
Athletic — Mentor
Cooking — Daughter
Catholic — Friend
Gardening — Girlfriend

Low Self-Complexity

Researcher — Student
Mentor
Daughter
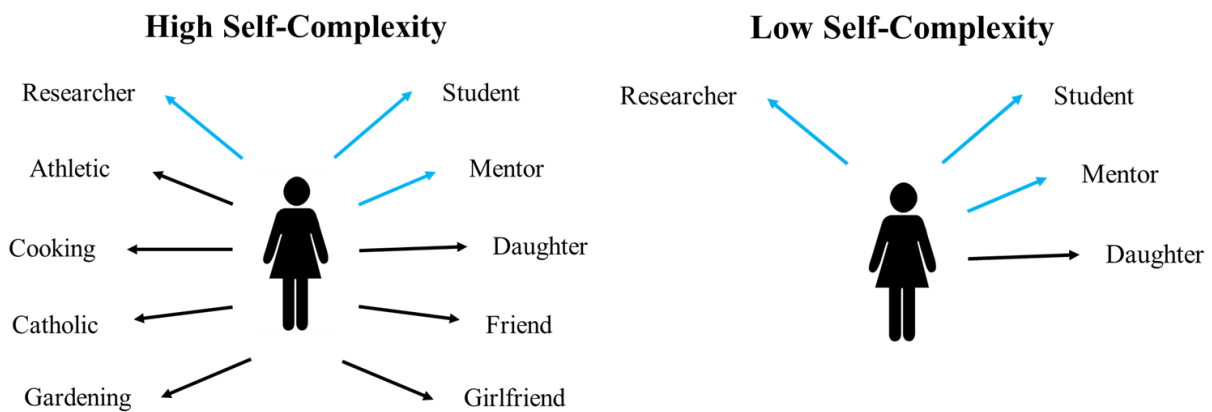
Figure 1: Comparison Between High Self-Complexity and Low Self-Complexity

Note. The blue arrows represent an overlap of traits between self-aspects.

Self-Complexity and Romantic Relationships

In romantic relationships, self-complexity also helps to deal with rejection. People high in self-complexity, for instance, dealt better with not having a date for Valentine's Day even if they were hoping to have one (Perry et al., 2020) and dealt better with the negative outcomes of going through a breakup (Smith & Cohen, 1993). Not only do romantic partners become part of one's self-concept, but romantic partners also change the structure of one's self-concept. For instance, abusive romantic partners often indirectly or directly restrict their partners from engaging in hobbies, work, or with people as a form of enforcing power and control over them (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs, n.d.). These restrictions can consequently change the structure of their self-concept and reduce their overall self-complexity. In fact, research on abused women shows that they often report a loss of self, describe themselves as being no one (Lynch, 2013), and tend to have low self-complexity (Steinberg et al., 2003). Because low self-complexity means that there is a lower number of self-aspects available it is possible that the relational self-aspect – how they see themselves as a girlfriend/boyfriend or wife/husband – has a greater

importance in their life. For this reason, we expect that higher self-complexity will decrease the effect of inclusion-of other-in-the-self of a romantic partner on biases in a romantic relationship.

Measurement of Self-Complexity

The card sorting task is typically used to assess people's level of self-complexity (Linville, 1985). In this task, participants are given 33 index cards, each with a trait (e.g., lazy). Participants are then asked to sort the cards into meaningful groups (i.e., self-aspects) that represent various aspects they perceive themselves to have. Participants can use any number of traits per group and can repeat traits across groups.

A self-complexity score is then calculated using the H statistic, which considers the total number of aspects as well as the overlap of traits across self-aspects. In the formula below, n is the total number of traits available and n_i is the number of traits assigned to each self-aspect created. Higher scores of self-complexity result when there is a greater number of self-aspects and a lower overlap of traits between them. The number of self-aspects and the overlap of traits across self-aspects can also be used separately as predictors.

$$H = log_2 n - \left(\sum_i n_i \, log_2 n_i \right) / n$$

Multiple lists of attributes have been used across various self-complexity studies. Prior research, however, established that the list of attributes used does not influence the findings of a study (McConnell et al., 2005). Therefore, a list of attributes different from the one described above will be used for the card sorting task in this study. More details are discussed in the method section.

A diverse sense of self could preserve a positive self-image – by reducing the spillover of negative thoughts and emotions – while at the same time allowing a person to acknowledge and address their mistakes or misdeeds. Similarly, self-complexity could reduce the negative emotions associated with accepting that a romantic partner is not perfect, thus enabling people to evaluate their romantic partners and their behaviors more accurately. It is also important to investigate risk factors that increase these biases.

Attachment Styles

People approach romantic relationships differently depending on the expectations of their working models of the self and others. The working model of the self depends on perceptions and/or expectations of oneself, whereas the working model of others depends on perceptions and/or expectations of others (Rice et al., 2020). A model of the self that is poor (vs. good) is characterized by doubts about one's self-worth and fear of not being loved or valued by others (Rice et al., 2020). A model of others that is poor (vs. good) is characterized by a general mistrust of others, emotional disengagement, and a desire to maintain independence (Rice et al., 2020). Different types of attachment are developed based on the combination of these models. Of particular interest for this investigation is anxious attachment. Specifically, people who are anxiously attached have a model of the self that is poor. Individual differences exist in the level of anxious attachment that people have, and variability in this is used to predict how people connect with romantic partners and deal with conflicts in a romantic relationship.

Anxious Attachment in Romantic Relationships

It can be challenging to develop or maintain a healthy romantic relationship with high levels of anxious attachment. Greater anxious attachment predicts negative outcomes in a

romantic relationship, like greater experience of jealousy (Rodriguez et al., 2015), poor skills when dealing with relational conflict (Tran & Simpson, 2009), and overall low satisfaction (Lowyck et al., 2008). People with greater anxious attachment are also more likely to aggressively pursue romantic partners. Greater anxious attachment predicts greater usage of mate retention tactics (Barbaro et al., 2016), unwanted relational pursuit (Wigman et al., 2008; De Smet et al., 2015), and stalking (Patton et al., 2010; Johnson & Thompson, 2016). Anxious attachment also predicts more severe negative outcomes such as intimate partner violence (Magorokosho & Mberira, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2015). A recent meta-analysis demonstrated that greater anxious attachment predicts greater perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence (Spencer et al., 2021). Further, in a sample of abused women, anxious attachment was over-represented (Henderson et al., 1997). It is possible that because people with anxious attachment fear abandonment, they also hold on to romantic partners or relationships that are not good for them.

People with greater anxious attachment desire greater closeness with romantic partners (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The desire for closeness encourages people with a greater anxious attachment to be more open to altering their self-concept and include a romantic partner's resources, perspectives, and characteristics (Slotter & Gardner, 2012). Consequently, people high in anxious attachment experience greater confusion after the dissolution of a romantic relationship (Slotter & Gardner, 2012). It is possible that people with an anxious attachment then place particular importance on their relational self-aspect. For this reason, we expect that greater anxious attachment will increase the effect of inclusion-of other-in-the-self of a romantic partner on biases in a romantic relationship.

The Current Investigation

This investigation tested across two studies the maladaptive biases that arise from experiencing high inclusion-of-other-in-the-self for a romantic partner and tested variables that were predicted to decrease or increase these biases. Study 1 tested how the level of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is associated with disregarding signs that indicate that a romantic partner might be unhealthy for one's emotional and physical well-being. Study 2 aimed to conceptually replicate Study 1 and further extend these findings by testing how the level of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is associated with sharing guilt for the transgressions committed by one's romantic partner. In both studies, self-complexity was tested as a protective factor, and anxious attachment was tested as a risk factor.

Chapter 2: Study 1

Study 1 had three primary predictions. First, it was predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner would result in greater positive evaluations of a romantic partner and lower negative evaluations of their behaviors. Second, it was predicted that higher self-complexity would decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Third, it was predicted that anxious attachment would increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Secondary analyses investigated how self-complexity and anxious attachment influenced the level of importance given to a self-aspect and the sense of incompleteness felt without a self-aspect.

Method

Participants

All a-priori power analyses conducted are summarized in Table 1. The largest sample size required to achieve power was 116 participants. Data collection is still ongoing and will continue until at least 116 participants who meet all eligibility criteria and pass all attention checks have been recruited. Sample descriptives and results reported are based on partial data.

A total of 220 participants were recruited for this study, but 143 participants were excluded from analyses. First, this study required participation in two separate sessions, but some participants only attended the first session. Second, an error in the programming of the experiment in Qualtrics resulted in incomplete responses. Third, it was pre-registered that participants would be excluded from data analyses if participants met one or more exclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria included not being single, failure of attention checks, and/or responses on primary variables that were 2.5 standard deviations away from group norms. The final sample includes 77 college students from The University of Texas at El Paso (50.65% Female; 77.92%

Hispanic, 7.79% White, 6.49% African American, 2.6% Asian, 1.3% Native American, and 3.9%

Other). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 ($M = 20.82$, $SD = 3.42$). All participants receive

class credit for their participation.

It is important to note that our analyses used two different sample sizes. This difference is

due to one additional exclusion criterion specific to the card sorting task. At least two self-

aspects are required to calculate self-complexity scores using the H-statistic. Participants with

less than two self-aspects were excluded from all analyses that included self-complexity as a

variable. Therefore, the final sample was reduced to 58 participants[1] for these analyses.

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[1] Demographic information for the sample used in analyses that involved self-complexity is similar to the final sample (46.55% Female; 75.86% Hispanic, 8.62% White, 6.90% African American, 1.72% Asian, 1.72% Native American, and 5.17% Other). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 ($M = 21.22$, $SD = 3.78$).

Table 1

A-Priority Power Analyses for Planned Statistical Tests

Hypothesis	Test	Effect Size	Power	Alpha	Sample Size
	Study 1				
Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner will result in greater positive evaluations of a romantic partner and lower negative evaluations of their behaviors.	Paired Sample T-test (two-tail)	$d_z = 1.67$[a]	.80	.05	6
Higher self-complexity will decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases.	Simple Moderation Model	$f^2 = .07$[b]	.80	.05	116
Higher anxious attachment will increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases.	Simple Moderation Model	$f^2 = .07$[b]	.80	.05	116
	Study 2				
Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner will result in greater positive evaluations of a romantic partner and lower negative evaluations of their behaviors.	Simple Linear regressions	$f^2 = .27$[c]	.80	.05	32
Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner will result in greater shared guilt for a romantic partner's transgression.	Simple Linear regressions	$f^2 = .27$[c]	.80	.05	32
Higher self-complexity will decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases.	Simple Moderation Model	$f^2 = .07$[b]	.80	.05	116
Higher anxious attachment will increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases.	Simple Moderation Model	$f^2 = .07$[b]	.80	.05	116

Note.

[a] The effect size was obtained from the pilot study reported in this investigation.

[b] Small-to-moderate effect size was chosen because this association has not been tested before.

[c] The effect size was obtained from prior studies conducted in our laboratory using the same outcomes. The effect size for the relationship between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and shared guilt was the smallest effect size and was chosen to be conservative.

Materials

Online Dating Profiles

Participants were told that the study aimed to test which type of question prompts encourage real connections between people on online dating platforms. The online dating profiles were used to manipulate inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and to reveal a transgression committed by the potential romantic partner (See Appendix A). Each dating profile was identified by a name so that participants could associate the learned information with a particular person without the need to provide photographs.

Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self Manipulation.

Different levels of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self were achieved by manipulating the level of self-disclosure to six randomly chosen questions included in the online dating profiles (e.g., *What is your most terrible memory?*). These questions were obtained from the interpersonal closeness generating task (Aron et al., 1997); two question prompts were chosen per each level of intimacy (i.e., small, moderate, and large). All dating profiles had the same question prompts but the answers to the question prompts were different. Half of the profiles had answers that were high in self-disclosure and were expected to elicit high inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (e.g., *My most terrible memory is receiving a call from a family member that my mother had died. For months, I felt anxious every time I received a call. I was always worried that someone was calling me to tell me that something bad had happened again*), whereas the other half of the profiles had answers that were low in self-disclosure and thus were expected to elicit low inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (e.g., *I don't feel comfortable sharing this. Sorry*).

The interpersonal closeness generating task requires a two-way interaction. There is an expectation that one will receive intimate information from a partner and share intimate information with that partner. Therefore, as part of this manipulation, participants were also asked to create an online dating profile and answer the same question prompts presented in the online dating profiles that they reviewed (See Appendix A). Participants were told that their answers would be shown to the people whose dating profiles they would review and were encouraged to avoid superficial responses to these question prompts.

This manipulation was pilot tested (N = 15). Levels of perceived self-disclosure were higher in the high self-disclosure condition (*M* = 5.67, *SD* = .99) than in the low self-disclosure condition (*M* = 2.00, *SD* = .93), *t* (14) = 10.35, *p* < .001. Accordingly, levels of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self were higher for romantic partners paired with high self-disclosure responses (*M* = 5.10, *SD* = 1.55) than for romantic partners paired with low self-disclosure responses (*M* = 2.17, *SD* = 1.18), *t* (14) = 6.17, *p* < .001. Therefore, the manipulation was effective. Participants also reported higher commitment, sympathy, and empathy in the high self-disclosure condition than in the low self-disclosure condition (See Table 2).

Table 2
Self-Disclosure Manipulation Effects

| | High Self-Disclosure | | Low Self-Disclosure | | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*
Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self	5.10	1.55	2.17	1.18	6.17	<.001
Commitment	4.77	1.41	2.33	1.38	5.55	<.001
Empathy	5.9	1.14	2.53	1.63	8.80	<.001
Sympathy	5.47	1.25	2.47	1.41	11.83	<.001

Note.

Romantic Partner Transgression.

An additional question prompt was included in all online dating profiles (i.e., *What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner?*). All answers to this additional question prompt described a transgression that the person in the online dating profile perpetrated against a past romantic partner (e.g., *My ex-girlfriend and I joined a volleyball tournament for school. She wasn't good at playing volleyball and she was making us lose all the time. I told her that she was useless to the team and that she looked dumb when playing. She ended up quitting the team.).* These transgressions were inspired by behaviors typically measured on intimate partner violence scales and by behaviors described in Reddit forums where people shared their negative experiences (e.g., victimization) in romantic relationships. While these transgressions may not be classified as outright aggression, they could serve as indicators for potential future aggression. Specifically, these transgressions are intended to be proxies of psychological abuse (e.g., yelling, insulting, humiliating, criticizing). Table 3 lists numerous scales used to assess intimate partner violence and includes examples of items from those scales that are intended to measure psychological abuse. This is not an exhaustive list of all intimate partner violence scales, but it does include some of the most widely used scales, such as the Conflict Tactics Scale and the Composite Abuse Scale (Bender, 2017). Similarly, the sample items selected are aimed to support that the transgressions used in the online dating profiles closely align with the types of behaviors measured to assess or screen for psychological abuse. For additional information and the full scales, see Thomson and colleagues (2006).

Table 3

Sample Items from Intimate Partner Violence Scales

Assessment	Items
Abusive Behavior Inventory	▪ Called you a name and/or criticized you
Composite Abuse Scale (CAS)	▪ Told me that I was ugly ▪ Told me that I wasn't good enough
Index of Psychological Abuse	▪ Called you names ▪ Ridiculed or criticized you in public ▪ Criticized your physical appearance and/or sexual attractiveness ▪ Criticized your strengths, or those parts of yourself which you are or once were proud of
Measure of Wife Abuse	▪ Your partner told you that you weren't good enough ▪ Your partner told you that you were ugly
Multidimensional Measure of Emotional Abuse	▪ Criticized the other person's appearance ▪ Called the other person a loser, failure, or similar term ▪ Called the other person worthless
Partner Abuse Scale – Non-Physical	▪ My partner tells me I am ugly and unattractive ▪ My partner insults or shames me in front of others
Profile of Psychological Abuse	▪ Tell you that you are worthless ▪ Make critical comments about your work inside or outside the home ▪ Discourage your plans or minimize your successes
Psychological Maltreatment of Women Inventory (PMWI)	▪ My partner put down my physical appearance ▪ My partner insulted me or shamed me in front of others ▪ My partner called me names

Revised Conflict Tactic Scales	▪ My partner insulted and swore at me
	▪ My partner called me fat or ugly
	▪ My partner accused me of being a lousy lover
Safe Dates – Psychological Abuse Victimization	▪ Said things to hurt my feelings on purpose
	▪ Insulted me in front of others
	▪ Put down my looks

Note. Complete measures and additional information can be found in Thomson and colleagues (2016)

These behaviors were also pilot tested in a sample of college students (N = 15) and assessed on negativity, commonality, and severity (See Table 4). Additionally, gender differences in the perception of these dimensions were also tested (See Table 4). Four behaviors were selected to be used in the online dating profiles. These behaviors were similar across all dimensions and demonstrated no gender differences.

Table 4

Descriptive Information for Verbal Abuse Behaviors

Behavior	M	SD	t	p
		Negativity		
I was driving, and my ex-boyfriend kept receiving text messages. I asked who was messaging him, but he wouldn't tell me. I needed to know so I tried taking his phone away and while doing so I accidentally unbuckled his seat belt. In the struggle, I merged into a different lane and got in a crash. He didn't survive. [A]	6.5	1.24	-1.79	.148
		Commonality		
	3.8	1.61	1.11	.292
		Severity		
	6.73	.80	-.82	.455
		Negativity		
	6.63	1.17	-1.26	.276
I used to call my ex-boyfriend Carbzilla every time that he would make me mad. I knew that he hated this nickname because he was very insecure about his weight, but he had a habit of pissing me off. I had to let my anger out somehow.		Commonality		
	4.07	1.44	-.61	.550
		Severity		
	6.2	1.61	-1.63	.176
		Negativity		
	6.6	.54	-2.81	**.033**
One of my ex-boyfriends was talking to one of his female friends at a cookout and I felt there was something more going on between them. I ended up calling him out on it and it turned into a heated argument. I screamed and insulted him in front of his friends.		Commonality		
	4.6	1.45	-.64	.550
		Severity		
	6.13	1.19	-.33	.750
		Negativity		
	5.47	1.25	-1.29	.233
One of my ex-partners loved eating spicy food, but I hate the smell of that type of food. Every time he would eat something like that, I would point out how disgusted I felt to be with him because he smelled horrible. I wouldn't even kiss him until he brushed his teeth.		Commonality		
	3.67	1.40	.96	.373
		Severity		
	4.53	1.51	-1.17	.289
		Negativity		

My ex-boyfriend and I joined a volleyball tournament for school. He wasn't good at playing volleyball and he was making us lose all the time. I told him that he was useless to the team and that he looked dumb when playing. He ended up quitting the team.

6.37	.77	-.54	.609	Commonality
3.73	1.58	.79	.454	Severity
5.47	1.36	1.24	.241	Negativity

My ex-boyfriend had a lot of acne. He was always purchasing products and trying new routines to control his acne. Even though I knew he felt embarrassed about his acne I would still call him a "crater face" in front of our friends and family.

6.6	1.12	-1.5	.208	Commonality
3.8	1.66	.69	.506	Severity
6.2	1.42	-.34	.745	Negativity

My ex-boyfriend had a unique sense of "style". Many times, I felt embarrassed to go out with him in public dressed like that. There were a couple of times that I told him that my 5-year-old nephew dressed better than him.

5.7	.80	-1.07	.313	Commonality
3.87	1.85	-1.00	.343	Severity
4.33	1.35	.54	.605	Negativity

My ex-boyfriend was a big TikTok user and wanted to become an influencer. He would post workout/motivational videos on his account, but they were so cringe. I told him that he should be embarrassed about what he posted and should delete the videos because he was never going to make it.

6.5	.78	-.71	.499	Commonality
4.0	2.07	-2.10	.056	Severity
5.8	1.26	-.45	.664	Negativity

We were at a party and there was an attractive guy that started flirting with me. I was flirting back, and my ex-boyfriend noticed. He started telling me that he didn't feel comfortable with how I was talking to him, and I told him that I wouldn't have the need to talk to other people if he put more effort on his appearance.

6.73	.68	.90	.386	Commonality
4.4	1.96	-3.27	**.011**	Severity
6.53	.64	.30	.769	

Behavior	Dimension			
One of my ex-boyfriends wanted to celebrate our first month of being together by going out for dinner. I was upset with him that day, so I told him that the idea was ridiculous and that there was nothing to celebrate about being with him.	Negativity	6.47	.81	-1.24	.251
	Commonality	4.13	2.10	-1.17	.279
	Severity	5.47	1.73	1.51	.154
We went on a double date, and we were playing Pictionary with some of my college friends. We kept losing because he would not give good clues or understand the clues I gave him. I get competitive so in the heat of the moment I yelled at him to stop being dumb.	Negativity	5.6	1.06	-3.06	**.013**
	Commonality	5.13	1.73	1.40	.202
	Severity	4.4	1.24	-1.09	.297
My ex-boyfriend was excited to show me an underground artist he found on social media. I criticized him for being interested in an artist that no one else was listening to and called him an attention seeker for always trying to be different from everyone else and avoiding everything that was considered mainstream.	Negativity	5.57	1.03	-2.01	.065
	Commonality	4.0	1.41	-2.67	**.033**
	Severity	4.93	1.33	.73	.482
My last boyfriend used to draw as a hobby. He got asked by a friend to draw a tattoo design. My ex-boyfriend was excited and texted me pictures of the designs he had created. I told him that his designs were amateur at best, and he ended up telling his friend that he couldn't do it.	Negativity	5.97	1.11	.53	.611
	Commonality	3.87	.99	-.77	.461
	Severity	5.0	1.77	1.88	.086

Note. Values in bold indicate significant gender differences. In all cases, women rated the behavior higher in that dimension in comparison to men. Behaviors in bold indicate the behaviors that were selected and used in the main study.

[a] Behavior was used to avoid ceiling effects. This behavior was intended to be extremely negative.

Self-Complexity

Self-complexity was assessed using a variation of Linville's (1985) card sorting task. Participants were presented with a total of 60 traits (30 positive and 30 negative) and were asked to form groups (i.e., self-aspects) using the traits provided to them (See Appendix B). Participants were additionally given five spaces to enter attributes not available in the list provided to them.[2] Participants were told that there was no specific requirement for the number of groups that needed to be created, but they had the option to report up to 10 self-aspects. Participants were also told that they could use the traits more than once across different self-aspects. Two scores can be obtained from the card sorting task; number of self-aspects and overlap between the self-aspects – indicated by the repetition of a trait across self-aspects. Overall scores of self-complexity were calculated using the H-statistic. Higher self-complexity is indicated by higher scores. Additionally, participants rated each self-aspect on the following: 1) how important the self-aspect is to their sense of self and 2) how incomplete they would feel without the self-aspect.

The card sorting task was also pilot tested in a sample of college students (N = 24). Participants were asked to rate the difficulty of the instructions ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 1.12$), the difficulty in completing the task ($M = 1.46$, $SD = .93$), and their agreement that it would be easier to complete the task in person (vs online) ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 1.18$) using a 7-point Likert scale. Based on these ratings, it was decided to implement the card sorting task online, which facilitated data collection.

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[2] These responses were not included in the calculation of self-complexity scores because the R package requires a consistent list of attributes across all participants.

Anxious Attachment

The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale Short Form (Wei et al., 2007) is a 12-item scale that assesses a person's anxious (6 items) and avoidant (6 items) attachment style (See Appendix C). Sample items include *"I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them"* (anxious) and *"I try to avoid getting too close to my partner"* (avoidant). Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Only the items to assess anxious attachment were used for this study. Item 4 was reverse coded prior to being aggregated to obtain an overall anxious attachment score (M = 4.08, SD = .86). Higher scores indicate higher anxious attachment. The anxious attachment subscale had poor internal reliability (α = .50). A Principal Component Analysis indicated two components, which seemed to reveal subcategories of 'wanting closeness' (Items 2 and 3) and 'needing reassurance' (Items 1, 4, 5, and 6). However, the internal reliability of this measure did not improve with the exclusion of items. Therefore, all items were kept and the average score of these items was used for analyses.[3]

Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self Scale

Participants completed this measure after being exposed to each online dating profile (See Appendix D). Higher scores indicate higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self. This measure was used as a manipulation check.

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[3] Exploratory analyses were conducted using an anxious attachment score with only four items. However, none of the reported findings changed.

Commitment

One item was used to measure participants expected levels of commitment to the person in the dating profile, *"How committed do you anticipate feeling to [NAME]?"* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all Committed) to 7 (Extremely Committed). Higher scores indicate higher commitment.

Evaluation of Romantic Partners

Five items were used to assess the desirability/suitability of the romantic partners presented in the online dating profiles (See Appendix E). Items included, "*I would match [NAME] on a dating application*", "*[NAME] is a desirable romantic partner*", "*I believe that [NAME] would treat me well*", "*I would be satisfied in a romantic relationship with [NAME]*", and *"I can see myself with [NAME] in a long-term relationship (i.e., a relationship that lasts for years)."* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Items were aggregated to obtain an overall evaluation score in the high inclusion condition ($M = 4.4$, $SD = .93$) and low inclusion condition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .96$). Higher scores indicate greater positive evaluations of romantic partners. This scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .88$).

Evaluation of Transgressions

Two items were used to assess participants' perception of the transgressions committed by the romantic partners presented in the online dating profiles (See Appendix F). Participants were told that they had been randomly assigned to review the answers of all romantic partners for 2 out of the 7 question prompts in the online dating profiles. Specifically, participants were 'randomly' assigned to review the answers to the question prompts, *"For what in your life do*

you feel most grateful?" and *"What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner?"* The first question prompt is irrelevant, but it is included to distract from the real focus of the study. When rating the first question prompt, participants responded to questions like *"How thoughtful is this response?"* and *"How relatable is this response?"* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale. When rating the second question prompt, participants responded to questions like *"How negative do you think this behavior is?"* and *"How acceptable do you think this behavior is?"* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all Negative/Acceptable) to 7 (Very Negative/Acceptable). Item 2 was reverse coded prior to being aggregated to obtain an overall score in the high inclusion condition ($M = 5.68$, $SD = .90$) and low inclusion condition ($M = 5.81$, $SD = .87$). Higher scores indicate higher negative evaluations of the transgression.

Four items were included to get additional information about the transgression and its association with the romantic partner. Items included *"How likely is it that [NAME] would behave like this with you?"*, *"How characteristic do you believe that this behavior is of [NAME]?"* , *"How responsible do you think [NAME] is for his behavior?"* and *"Overall, how likely are you to agree that this is a good question prompt to include in online dating profiles?"*. Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating a higher rating of that variable.

Procedure

The first session was administered online. In this session, participants completed an online dating profile that consisted of three parts. First, participants completed the card sorting task. As part of the card sorting task, participants reported on the importance given to each self-aspect and feelings of incompleteness if the self-aspect were not to exist. Second, participants

answered the same question prompts presented in the online dating profiles that they reviewed. Lastly, participants completed the anxious attachment items. The second session was administered in person. In this session, participants were exposed to four online dating profiles. The online dating profiles were displayed for at least 1 minute. After 1 minute, the participants were able to move on, but they could stay reviewing the profile for as long as needed. First, participants completed the Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self Scale to assess their perceived closeness with the person in the online dating profile, followed by the commitment item. Second, participants evaluated each romantic partner and their answers to two of the question prompts. Lastly, the participants were debriefed and given a list of resources for romantic relationships (See Appendix G).

Results

Manipulation Check

Levels of self-disclosure were manipulated in the online dating profiles. Self-disclosure was perceived to be higher in the high self-disclosure condition ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.01$) than in the low self-disclosure condition ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.19$, t (76) = 14.27, $p < .001$. As expected, this manipulation influenced the levels of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self. Specifically, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was higher in the high self-disclosure condition ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.28$) than in the low self-disclosure condition ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.07$), t (76) = 12.14, $p < .001$. Hence, the manipulation was effective. However, this manipulation also impacted levels of commitment. Commitment was higher in the self-disclosure condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.02$) than in the low self-disclosure condition ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.04$), t (76) = 13.97, $p < .001$. The effect of this manipulation on commitment was not intended and will be excluded from our analyses.

Evaluation of Romantic Partners

A paired sample t-test was conducted to test mean differences in the evaluation of romantic partners as desirable based on inclusion-of-other-in-the-self conditions. As predicted, evaluations of romantic partners were more positive in the high inclusion condition ($M = 4.4$, $SD = .93$) than in the low inclusion condition ($M = 2.39$, $SD = .96$), $t(76) = 15.60$, $p < .001$.

Evaluation of Romantic Partner's Transgressions

A paired sample t-test was also conducted to test mean differences in the evaluation of transgressions committed by romantic partners based on inclusion-of-other-in-the-self conditions. Contrary to the prediction that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would decrease negative evaluations, the evaluation for transgressions committed by romantic partners did not differ between the high inclusion ($M = 5.68$, $SD = .90$) and low inclusion conditions ($M = 5.81$, $SD = .87$), $t(76) = -1.30$, $p = .196$.

Exploratory

Additional paired sample t-tests were conducted to explore if and how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self influenced other evaluations related to the transgression committed by a romantic partner. Participants were less likely to expect that a romantic partner would commit a similar transgression towards them in the high inclusion ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.31$) than in the low inclusion condition ($M = 5.22$, $SD = 1.32$), $t(76) = -5.08$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants were less likely to believe that the transgression was characteristic of the romantic partner in the high inclusion ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.27$) than in the low inclusion condition ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(76) = -4.17$, $p < .001$. However, romantic partners were found to be equally responsible for perpetrating the

transgression in the high inclusion ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.29$) and low inclusion conditions ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.53$), t (76) = .73, $p = .468$.

Self-Complexity as a Protective Factor

Despite the detailed instructions and examples provided (See Appendix B), some participants still offered responses for self-aspects that were not relevant (e.g., listed a personality trait). Two raters reviewed all responses and identified non-eligible responses. A high degree of inter-rater reliability was found between both raters. The average coding ICC was .92 with a 95% CI from .867 to .951 (F (57, 57.5) = 23.4, $p <. 001$). Participants with two or more eligible self-aspects were retained for data analysis. Any non-eligible self-aspects and corresponding associated attributes were eliminated[4]. As a reminder, tests involving self-complexity were conducted using the reduced sample of 58 participants.

Self-complexity scores were calculated using an R package (i.e., selfcomplexity) programmed to automate the calculation of the most frequently used indices of self-complexity such as the H-statistic. The number of self-aspects reported ranged from 1 to 10 ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.74$), and the self-complexity scores ranged from .57 to 3.92 ($M = 1.98$, $SD = .73$).

A simple moderation analysis was conducted to test self-complexity as a protective factor for inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Self-complexity was tested as a moderator only for evaluations of romantic partners, as the other predicted inclusion-of-other-in-the-self bias (i.e., evaluations of transgressions) was not significant. The overall model was significant, F (3, 112) = 45.15, p < .001. Evaluations of romantic partners were less positive in the low (vs high) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self condition (B = -2.53, $p < .001$). Self-complexity (B = -.08, $p =$

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[4] A copy of the original data set was kept.

.653) and the interaction between these two (B = .25, p = .311) were unassociated with evaluations of romantic partners.

Exploratory

Simple linear regressions were conducted to explore the relationship between self-complexity and the importance given to self-aspects, as well as the incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect. Self-complexity was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = .01, p = .928). Higher self-complexity was associated with a higher average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .51, p = .024). This effect was driven by gender. Only women showed this association (B = .82, p = .011).[5]

The same tests were conducted using a subset of the data (N = 45) that focused only on the self-aspects that were above the mean on ratings of importance (M = 5.62, SD = 1.58) and incompleteness without a self-aspect (M = 4.74, SD = 1.95). Higher self-complexity was associated with higher average importance given to self-aspects (B = .47, p = .002) and higher average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .63, p = .001). These associations were alike for women and men.

Anxious Attachment as a Risk Factor

A simple moderation analysis was conducted to test anxious attachment as a risk factor for inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Anxious attachment was tested as a moderator only for evaluations of romantic partners, as the other predicted inclusion-of-other-in-the-self bias (i.e., evaluations of transgressions) was not significant. The overall model was significant, $F(3,150)$ =

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[5] Gender was tested as a predictor for all analyses reported in this investigation. However, gender is only explicitly discussed when it emerges as a significant predictor. All other findings indicated no gender differences.

59.27, $p < .001$. Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (B = -.85, $p = .258$), anxious attachment (B = .11, $p = .396$), and the interaction between these two (B = -.28, $p = .113$) were unassociated with evaluations of romantic partners.

Exploratory

Simple linear regressions were conducted to explore the relationship between anxious attachment and the importance given to self-aspects, as well as the incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect. Anxious attachment was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = -.08, p = .576) and the average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .07, p = .711).

The same tests were conducted using the subset of responses for self-aspects that were particularly significant for participants. Anxious attachment was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = -.13, $p = .339$) and the average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .14, $p = .379$).

Discussion

It was predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would be associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners and lower negative evaluations for their transgressions. The data provides mixed support for these predictions. As expected, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self did bias evaluations for romantic partners. Specifically, romantic partners were perceived as more desirable and suitable to date even when they had been known to engage in negative behaviors (e.g., verbal abuse). Contrary to the prediction, however, evaluations toward the behavior itself did not decrease with higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner. The level of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self influenced other aspects related to the transgression

committed by a romantic partner. Romantic partners were less likely to be expected to engage in a similar transgression towards them, and the transgression was perceived to be less characteristic of the romantic partner.

It was also predicted that self-complexity would decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases, and anxious attachment would increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Neither of these predictions were supported by the data. Self-complexity and anxious attachment did not moderate the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and evaluations of romantic partners. However, it is important to note that we lacked the statistical power to detect these effects due to the exclusion of responses, which left us below the required sample size. Lastly, it was predicted that self-complexity would be a protective factor by decreasing the importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect, whereas it was predicted that anxious attachment would be a risk factor by doing the opposite (i.e., increasing these). Contrary to these predictions, self-complexity increased rather than decreased the importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect, whereas anxious attachment had no influence. Gender was initially a significant moderator for one of these self-complexity effects but vanished when looking at a subset of our data that included only the self-aspects that were deemed to be the most valuable based on participants' ratings. Gender did not influence any of the other effects reported. These biases appear to affect men and women similarly.

Chapter 3: Study 2

There are notable differences between studies 1 and 2. First, the focus of Study 1 was on singles, whereas the focus of Study 2 was on people in ongoing romantic relationships. Second, Study 1 is hypothetical, whereas Study 2 is real. Although participants in Study 1 were made to believe that they were interacting with real people, there was no expectation that they would meet them. In Study 2, participants were asked to think of a romantic partner with whom they have an ongoing romantic relationship. Third, in Study 1, participants rated their evaluations of transgressions committed to someone unknown to them, whereas in Study 2, participants rated their evaluations of transgressions committed toward them. Lastly, there was an additional dependent variable considered in Study 2. Study 2 also focused on how inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was associated with feeling responsible for the transgressions of a romantic partner.

Study 2 had four primary predictions. First, it was predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner would produce greater positive evaluations of a romantic partner and lower negative evaluations of their behaviors. Second, it was predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner would produce greater shared guilt experienced for the transgressions of a romantic partner. Third, it was predicted that higher self-complexity would decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Fourth, it was predicted that anxious attachment would increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Secondary analyses investigated how self-complexity and anxious attachment influence the level of importance given to and the sense of incompleteness without a self-aspect. Secondary analyses also investigated if higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner predicted more self-attributions for why a transgression occurred.

Method

Participants

The largest sample size required to achieve power was 116 participants (See Table 1). Data collection is still ongoing and will continue until at least 116 participants who meet all eligibility criteria and pass all attention checks have been recruited. Sample descriptives and results reported are based on partial data.

A total of 174 participants were recruited for this study, but 62 participants were excluded from analyses. It was pre-registered that participants would be excluded from data analyses if participants met one or more exclusion criteria. Exclusion criteria included not being in a romantic relationship, failure of attention checks, and/or responses on primary variables that were 2.5 standard deviations away from group norms. The final sample included 112 college students from The University of Texas at El Paso (57.14% Female, 41.07% Male, 1.78% Other; 83.04% Hispanic, 8.93% White, 4.46% African American, .89% Asian, and 2.68% Other). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 41 ($M = 21.23$, $SD = 4.49$). All participants received class credit for their participation. Two different sample sizes were also used for the analyses in this study. Participants with less than two self-aspects were excluded from all analyses that included self-complexity as a variable. Therefore, the final sample was reduced to 80 participants[6] for these analyses.

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[6] Demographic information for the sample used in analyses that involved self-complexity is similar to the final sample (60% Female, 37.5% Male, 2.5% Other; 81.25% Hispanic, 11.25% White, 3.75% African American, 1.25% Asian, and 2.5% Other). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 41 ($M = 21.46$, $SD = 4.94$).

Materials

The materials for Study 2 were similar to those of Study 1. Minor modifications were made to some of the measures to better fit the context of an ongoing romantic relationship. The measures for self-complexity and anxious attachment will be identical to those described in Study 1 and thus are not detailed here. All other measures and the respective modifications are discussed below.

Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self

Participants completed this measure and selected the set of circles that best represented how close they felt to their romantic partner (See Appendix D). Higher scores indicate higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self.

Commitment

Two items were used to measure the level of commitment to a romantic partner and romantic relationship, *"How committed do you feel to your romantic partner?"* and *"How committed do you feel to your romantic relationship?"* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all Committed) to 7 (Extremely Committed). These items were strongly correlated ($r = .76$, $p < .001$) and thus were aggregated. Higher scores indicate higher commitment.

Evaluation of Romantic Partners

Twelve items were used to assess the desirability/suitability of romantic partners (See Appendix E). These items are more relevant for evaluations of real-life romantic partners. Items included positive (e.g., intelligent) and negative (e.g., controlling and dominant) characteristics.

Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all Characteristic) to 7 (Completely Characteristic). Items 4, 5, 6, and 7 were reverse coded prior to being aggregated to obtain an overall evaluation score. Higher scores indicate greater positive evaluations of romantic partners. This scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .79$).

Evaluations of Romantic Partners' Transgressions

Participants were asked to write for 5 minutes about a transgression that met the following criteria: It was perpetrated by their romantic partner towards them and is the most memorable/painful to them (See Appendix F). Then, two items were used to assess participants' evaluation of the transgression committed by their romantic partner (See Appendix F). Items included "*How negative do you think this behavior is?*" and *"How acceptable do you think this behavior is?"* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Not at all Negative/Not at all Acceptable) to 7 (Very Negative/Very Acceptable). Item 2 was reverse coded prior to being aggregated to obtain an overall evaluation score. Higher scores indicate higher negative evaluations of the transgression. Participants were also asked to report when the transgression took place, how frequently the transgression happens, how characteristic the transgression is of the romantic partner, how severe the transgression is, how much the transgression affected them when it happened, and how much the transgression still affects them now (at the time they participated).

Shared Guilt

Five items were used to assess shared guilt experienced for a romantic partner's transgressions (See Appendix I). Items included, *"I feel guilty about my romantic partner's actions"*, *"I feel responsible for my romantic partner's actions"*, *"I feel others would judge me*

based on my romantic partner's actions", "I feel that this happened because of something that I did or didn't do", and *"I feel that this happened because of the kind of person that I am."* Responses were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). A Principal Component Analysis indicated that item 3 had the lowest loading value. Further, Cronbach's alpha indicated that internal reliability would be higher if item 3 were to be dropped. Therefore, item 3 was removed. The remaining items were aggregated to obtain an overall shared guilt score. This scale had acceptable internal reliability ($\alpha = .71$). Additionally, participants completed an open-ended question inquiring about the factors that they believed led to the transgression happening. These responses were coded to be self or partner attributions.

Procedure

This study was administered online. Participants began by completing the card sorting task. As part of the card sorting task, participants reported the importance given to each self-aspect and sense of incompleteness if the self-aspect were not to exist. Then, participants completed the anxious attachment items and reported on their inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of and commitment to their romantic partner. Following this, participants were asked to write for 5 minutes about a transgression that their romantic partner did to them. After the writing task, participants reported on their evaluation of the transgression, reported their shared guilt, and answered the open-ended question. Then, participants evaluated their romantic partners. Lastly, participants completed a demographic form (See Appendix G), were debriefed, and received a list of resources for romantic relationships (See Appendix H).

Results

Correlations

Table 5 summarizes correlations among all variables. Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner was associated with higher levels of commitment ($r = .36$, $p < .001$) and higher positive evaluations for romantic partners ($r = .28$, $p = .003$). Higher commitment to a romantic partner was also associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners ($r =.20$, $p = .037$). Higher shared guilt experienced for a romantic partner's transgression was associated with lower positive evaluations of romantic partners ($r = -.22$, $p = .021$) and lower negative evaluations of a romantic partner's transgressions ($r = -.26$, $p = .005$). Lastly, higher anxious attachment was associated with lower positive evaluations of romantic partners ($r = -.30$, $p =.002$) and higher experience of shared guilt for a romantic partner's transgression ($r = .32$, $p = .001$). Self-complexity and gender were not associated with either of the variables.

Evaluation of Romantic Partners

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and evaluation of romantic partners. As predicted, higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners, $B = .18$, $t (110) = 3.09$, $p = .003$.

Exploratory

A multiple linear regression was conducted with commitment included as a predictor. Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners, $B = .15$, $t (109) = 2.48$, $p = .015$. However, commitment to a romantic partner

and relationship was unassociated with evaluations for romantic partners, B = .09, t (109) = 1.13, p =.262.

Table 5

Correlation Between Variables

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Inclusion of Other in the Self		----						
2. Commitment		**.36** **(< .001)**	----					
3. Partner Evaluation		**.28** **(.003)**	**.20** **(.037)**	----				
4. Behavior Evaluation		-.11 (.246)	-.14 (.145)	-.18 (.059)	----			
5. Shared Guilt		.01 (.942)	-.04 (.658)	**-.22** **(.021)**	**-.26** **(.005)**	----		
6. Self-Complexity		-.02 (.881)	-.01 (.948)	-.06 (.577)	.21 (.063)	.11 (.339)	----	
7. Anxious Attachment		-.11 (.245)	.05 (.635)	**-.30** **(.002)**	.09 (.335)	**.32** **(.001)**	.16 (.157)	----
	M	5.17	6.11	5.16	5.12	2.78	2.18	3.98
	SD	1.30	1.00	.83	1.30	1.44	.87	1.12
	α	----	----	.79	----	.71	----	.66

Note. Values in bold indicate the effects that were significant. Information related to self-complexity is based on the reduced sample size of 80 participants.

Evaluation of Romantic Partner's Transgressions

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and evaluation of a romantic partner's transgressions. Contrary to the prediction that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would decrease negative evaluations, the evaluation for transgressions committed by romantic partners was unassociated with inclusion-of-other-in-the self, B = -.11, t (110) = -1.17, p =.246.

Approximately 88% of participants wrote about a transgression that happened within the last year, and 54% of participants reported that this was the first time the transgression happened. On average, participants reported greater levels of pain when the transgression happened ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.57$) than at the time they completed the study ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.80$). Additional simple linear regressions were conducted to explore the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and other aspects of the transgression committed by romantic partners. This test neared significance. Higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was associated with a decreased belief that the transgression was characteristic of the romantic partner, which replicates the finding from Study 1, $B = -.20$, $t(110) = -1.82$, $p = .071$.

A framework analysis approach was used to analyze the content in the writing task for the transgressions that participants reported. A framework analysis approach is a systematic method of analyzing qualitative data to identify themes in text. First, two raters reviewed all responses and indexed keywords from the transgressions described. Then, these keywords were grouped to develop a coding framework (See Appendix J). Second, two additional raters used the coding framework to code all responses into the different categories. A moderate degree of inter-rater reliability was found between our raters. The average coding ICC was .42 with a 95% CI from .251 to .56 ($F(110,110) = 2.42$, $p < .001$). Third, frequency counts were conducted to identify the most common themes in transgressions. The top five themes were deception (17.86%), lack of communication (16.96%), lack of respect for feelings and needs (10.71%), disrespectful communication (9.82%), and lack of boundaries (8.93%). Table 6 provides detailed information about these themes and includes examples.

Table 6

Top 5 Themes in Transgressions

Theme	Description	Example
Deception	Discussing instances of deception or concealment of the truth.	Lying about where and who he was with at a party. He was supposedly out with his brother but actually went with his two cousins and other girls I did not know. And he lied about being in his dad's house when he was actually at a party. I found out through one of those girls answering his cell phone and explaining where and who he was with.
Lack of Communication	Discussing instances when their partner failed to communicate feelings, thoughts, or behaviors.	One time he did not respond to me for days which then triggered my anxious attachment style. In the moment I felt very uneasy because I wasn't sure why he wasn't responding to me. Later I found out he was just overwhelmed.
Lack of Respect for Feelings and Needs	Discussing instances when their feelings and needs were dismissed by their partner.	My partner dragged me to a party even though I kept telling them I didn't want to because I was feeling under the weather from classes. The party was a friend of my partners who I don't get along with, so it added even more uncomfortable emotions. During this time, I was struggling/failing with my assignments and exams due to being overwhelmed and slightly underprepared with the content.
Disrespectful Communication	Discussing instances when their partner becomes disrespectful or demeaning when communicating with them.	A few weeks ago, we were out with some friends. My partner became upset with me and said some hurtful things in front of others. This has stuck with me, but I have gotten over it. I felt very hurt and betrayed in a sense, but I had also said some hurtful things.
Lack of Boundaries	Discussing instances where emotional or physical boundaries were not formed and implemented in the relationship or with others.	Me and my current partner have been dating for over 6 months. While we were out on a date, she had the nerve to boldly claim that she had been dating our server. When she said this, at first, I thought it was a joke, until I saw that they had a full conversation in front of me. They were catching up ever since they split up. When this happened, I felt betrayed and worthless as my girlfriend didn't even think of mentioning me as her current boyfriend to her ex-boyfriend. I was embarrassed and in a way was sad and full of sorrow as I was broken. It had felt as if she had missed him for this entire time.

Note. Small changes were made to the examples. No changes were made that would change the meaning of what is being described.

Shared Guilt for Transgressions

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and shared guilt experienced for the transgressions of a romantic partner. Contrary to the prediction that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would increase the experience of shared guilt, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was unassociated with shared guilt, B = .01, t (110) = .07, p = .942. However, a significant association was found among women. Specifically, women (vs men) experienced lower levels of shared guilt (B = -.56, p = .046).

Exploratory

A simple linear regression was also conducted to test the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and the number of self and other attributions made for why the transgression happened. Contrary to the prediction that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would predict a greater number of self-attributions, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was unassociated with both self-attributions (B = .11, p = .298) and other-attributions (B = .16, p = 1.24). A t-test revealed that participants were more likely to report other attributions (M = 2.29, SD = 1.39) than self-attributions (M = 1.39, SD = 1.39) for why the transgression happened, t (111) = -2.47, p = .015.

Self-Complexity as a Protective Factor

Data cleaning and the calculation of self-complexity scores were done exactly as described in Study 1. Tests involving self-complexity were conducted using the reduced sample of 80 participants. A high degree of inter-rater reliability was found between both raters. The average coding ICC was .92 with a 95% CI from .867 to .951 (F (57, 57.5) = 23.4, p <. 001). The number of self-aspects reported ranged from 2 to 9 (M = 3.45, SD = 1.33), and the self-complexity scores ranged from .81 to 4.14 (M = 2.18, SD = .87).

A simple moderation analysis was conducted to test self-complexity as a protective factor for inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Self-complexity was tested as a moderator only for evaluations of romantic partners, as the other predicted inclusion-of-other-in-the-self bias (i.e., evaluations of transgressions and shared guilt) were not significant. The overall model was significant, $F(3,76) = 3.12$, $p = .031$. Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (B = .32, $p = .054$), self-complexity (B = .26, $p = .482$), and the interaction between these two (B = -.06, $p = .373$) were unassociated with evaluations of romantic partners.

Exploratory

Simple linear regressions were conducted to explore the relationship between self-complexity and the importance given to self-aspects, as well as the sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect. Self-complexity was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = -.14, p = .171) and the average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = -.05, p = .734).

The same tests were conducted using a subset of the data (N = 67) that focused only on the self-aspects that were above the mean on ratings of importance ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.43$) and incompleteness without a self-aspect ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 1.89$). Higher self-complexity was associated with higher average importance given to self-aspects (B = .30, $p = .041$) and higher average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .54, $p = .003$). However, the latter effect seemed to be driven by gender. Only women showed this association (B = .60, p = .011).

Anxious Attachment as a Risk Factor

A simple moderation analysis was conducted to test anxious attachment as a risk factor for inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Anxious attachment was tested as a moderator only for evaluations of romantic partners, as the other predicted inclusion-of-other-in-the-self bias (i.e., evaluations of transgressions and shared guilt) was not significant. The overall model was significant, $F (3, 108) = 6.39, p = .001$. Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (B = .20, $p = .291$), anxious attachment (B = -.15 $p = .550$), and the interaction between these two (B = -.01, $p = .837$) were unassociated with evaluations of romantic partners.

Exploratory

Simple linear regressions were conducted to explore the relationship between anxious attachment and the importance given to self-aspects, as well as the incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect. Anxious attachment was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = .003, $p = .967$) and the average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .14, $p = .175$).

The same tests were conducted using the subset of responses for self-aspects that were particularly significant for participants. Anxious attachment was unassociated with the average importance given to self-aspects (B = -.02, $p = .768$) and the average sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect (B = .10, $p = .272$).

Discussion

It was predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would be associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners and lower negative evaluations for their transgressions. The data provides mixed support for these predictions. As expected, inclusion-of-other-in-the-

self was associated with biased evaluations for romantic partners. Specifically, evaluations for romantic partners were more positive as inclusion-of-other-in-the-self for the romantic partner increased. This effect remained significant even when another relationship variable – commitment – was included in the model. Therefore, this bias seems to be specifically related to the overlap of identities and not necessarily to the overall connection between romantic partners. Unexpectedly, the level of shared guilt experienced for the transgressions of romantic partners decreased the positive evaluations of those partners. Contrary to the prediction, evaluations toward the behavior itself did not decrease with higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self of a romantic partner. However, the finding that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is associated with perceiving a transgression as less characteristic of the romantic partner was replicated. It was also predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would be associated with higher shared guilt experienced for the transgression of a romantic partner. This prediction was also not supported. Interestingly, however, correlational findings showed that as shared guilt increased, the negative evaluations of the transgression decreased. Further, an exploratory test with gender as a predictor revealed that women are less likely to experience shared guilt for the transgressions committed by their romantic partners. However, this effect was not predicted.

It was also predicted that self-complexity would decrease inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases, and anxious attachment would increase inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Neither of these predictions were supported by the data. Self-complexity and anxious attachment did not moderate the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and evaluations of romantic partners. However, it is important to note that we lacked the statistical power to detect these effects due to the exclusion of responses, which left us below the required sample size. Correlational findings provided mixed support for these predictions. Higher anxious attachment

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was associated with increased experience of shared guilt. This provides some evidence that anxious attachment may be a risk factor for biases previously linked to increased inclusion-of-other-in-the-self for a romantic partner. Lastly, it was predicted that self-complexity would be a protective factor by decreasing the importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced for a self-aspect, whereas it was predicted that anxious attachment would be a risk factor by doing the opposite (i.e., increasing these biases). Contrary to these predictions, self-complexity increased rather than decreased the importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect, whereas anxious attachment had no influence. Further, the effect of self-complexity on sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect was observed only in women. Gender did not influence any of the other effects reported. These biases appear to affect men and women similarly.

Chapter 4: General Discussion

Closeness is an important foundation for a romantic relationship as it enhances a couple's resilience to overcome challenges. Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is a specific form of closeness characterized by an overlap in identities, which enables mutual influence between romantic partners. This can be a source of strength for a romantic relationship but also poses some potential risks. In this investigation, the negative relationship outcomes of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self were tested across two studies using different populations (singles vs. people in romantic relationships) and methodology (experiment vs. correlational). Additionally, protective and risk factors predicted to moderate these outcomes were also tested.

Evaluations of Romantic Partners

As predicted, both studies strongly supported that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self gives rise to biases related to how we evaluate romantic partners. Specifically, both studies found that greater inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was associated with higher positive evaluations for romantic partners. This replicates unpublished findings from our laboratory that found this effect using the same methodology (i.e., online dating profiles). It also aligns with research that indicates that people generally hold their romantic partners in higher regard (LeBel & Campbell, 2009; Song et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2011) and that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self shields a romantic relationship from various challenges (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008; Lewandowski & Ackerman, 2006; Le et al., 2010; Auger et al., 2017). Each study offers unique insights that warrant consideration. In Study 1, when inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was high, participants perceived romantic partners as more desirable and suitable to date regardless of having access to information that indicated he/she/they had been a bad romantic partner in a prior romantic relationship. Overlooking this information about a romantic partner and creating expectations of

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a satisfactory, long-term relationship is troublesome. It decreases their ability to identify red flags and puts them in harm's way as they are still open to interacting with said romantic partner. Even more concerning is that this bias occurred with minimal interaction with the romantic partner (i.e., exposure to online dating profiles). People often overestimate their willingness to reject romantic partners. People are less likely to do so to avoid hurting the other person's feelings, even when the partners are unattractive or do not match their preferences (Joel et al., 2014). This aligns with research findings on commitment, which demonstrate that those who are highly committed have biased expectations of their emotional pain (i.e. expecting more heartbreak) if they were to end their romantic relationship (Arriaga et al., 2013). In Study 2, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self had a stronger association with evaluations for romantic partners than commitment. Although these constructs are closely related, they are not identical (Aron et al., 2022). This distinction is important because the findings from this investigation hint at the underlying mechanism in which inclusion-of-other-in-the-self may bring about these biases. Specifically, the findings indicate that this bias is more closely related to an overlap in identities than an overall connection. Unpublished data from our laboratory related to a study on the student-advisor relationship provides similar evidence: Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was a better predictor of the outcomes than other positive attributes of the student-advisor relationship, such as perceived support from an advisor and satisfaction with the mentoring relationship.

Evaluation of Romantic Partners' Transgressions

There is mixed support for the prediction that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self decreases negative evaluations for transgressions perpetrated by romantic partners. Neither Study 1 nor Study 2 provided evidence that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self influences the attitude towards the transgression itself. This does not replicate unpublished findings from our laboratory that support

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this prediction using the same methodology. There is one difference between this investigation and my previous work that could potentially explain this discrepancy. Specifically, this investigation focused only on psychological abuse behaviors, whereas the prior study examined four different types of behaviors: verbal abuse, physical abuse, threats, and invasion of privacy. Although the level of negativity for behaviors was controlled, psychological abuse behaviors in general are normalized. For example, results from the pilot study of negative behaviors indicated that most of these behaviors were perceived to be relatively common (i.e., above the midpoint) in romantic relationships. Additionally, this null finding fails to replicate other studies that have shown people are biased toward romantic partners' actions (Thai & Lockwood, 2015) and self-image threats created by romantic partners (Gardner et al., 2002). It also fails to replicate work that demonstrates that people change their ideal partner preferences to match the characteristics of their partner (Fletcher et al., 2000). In Study 1, however, exploratory findings revealed that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self influenced other attributes of the transgression. Specifically, when inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was high, participants were less likely to believe that this behavior reflected who the romantic partner is and less likely to expect this behavior to continue if they were to be romantically involved with him/her/they. The finding that transgressions are perceived as less characteristic of romantic partners was also supported by correlational findings from Study 2. The present experience of positive affect or positive actions from romantic partners is associated with the anticipation of experiencing positive affect and/or positive actions from romantic partners in the future (Lemay et al., 2015). Similarly, high inclusion-of-other-in-the-self might have elicited a positive affect, which influenced these optimistic future expectations related to the romantic partners' transgressions.

Shared Guilt for Romantic Partner's Transgressions

There was no support for the prediction that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self increases guilt experienced for the transgressions perpetrated by romantic partners. This does not replicate unpublished findings from our laboratory that support this prediction. However, there are significant differences between the studies that can explain this discrepancy. Prior work focused on hypothetical transgressions related to discrimination, whereas this study focused on real transgressions within the context of a romantic relationship. Evaluations might differ significantly between these types of transgressions. While most people agree that discrimination is inherently wrong, behaviors in romantic relationships are heavily influenced by individual beliefs and expectations. For instance, people often disagree on what counts as infidelity (Thomson & Sullivan, 2016; Bozoyan & Schmiedeberg, 2023). Although participants were given specific criteria for the transgression to be reported (i.e., most memorable, painful), there was a lot of variability in the reported transgressions. Transgressions included serious behaviors (e.g., taking photographs during intimacy without consent) and less serious behaviors (e.g., using a serious tone in a conversation). It is also inconsistent with research showing that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self is related to empathy, which consequently increases the activation of vicarious pain and feelings of unpleasantness from witnessing a romantic partner's physical suffering (López-Solà et al., 2020). It was also predicted that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would increase self-attributions related to why the transgression happened. This was not supported. Inclusion-of-other-in-the-self was unassociated with the number of reasons provided as to why the transgression occurred. Further, exploratory findings indicated that participants were more likely to provide reasons why the transgression happened that were related to their romantic partner than reasons related to themselves. Thus deeming their romantic partner more responsible

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for the transgression. This is congruent with the literature on attributions, which indicates that people are generally more likely to make external attributions for negative events than positive ones. For instance, when evaluating honest but hurtful evaluative messages in romantic relationships, people are more likely to remember messages to which they were the recipients and rated these as more intentionally hurtful (Zhang, 2009).

Self-Complexity as a Protective Factor

There was no support for the prediction that self-complexity decreases inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. It is important to note that neither of the studies had enough power to detect this effect due to the number of excluded responses. The test of moderated relationships is more susceptible to different statistical attributes, such as sample size (Aguinis et al., 2005). It should also be noted that self-complexity scores can be calculated using different formulas and that variations in these calculations can result in variations in results (Smyth et al., 2022). Further, two out of three of our predicted inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases were non-significant. Therefore, only one moderation analysis was tested. Self-complexity did not moderate the relationship between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and evaluations for romantic partners. This is inconsistent with research showing that maintaining a sense of otherness (i.e., individuality) decreases the negative effects of too much closeness in a romantic relationship (Muise & Goss, 2024). Thus, it hints that having a diverse sense of self is important. A potential explanation for this null finding – aside from statistical considerations – is that the outcomes measured may not have been the most suitable for testing the effect of self-complexity. The literature on self-complexity has indicated that higher self-complexity is associated with better coping with challenges (Linville, 1985; Linville, 1987; Perry et al., 2020; Smith & Cohen, 1993). Evaluating a romantic partner, regardless of the romantic partner being associated with a transgression, may

not accurately reflect how people cope with challenges. Instead, forcing people to face a particular fear – such as singlehood – may be more appropriate. Singlehood can be a challenging experience, especially if it is perceived to not be self-imposed (Apostolou & Tsangari, 2022; Kislev, 2023). For instance, asking participants to make decisions that either allow them to escape (i.e., initiate or maintain a relationship) or face (i.e., not initiate or end a relationship) singlehood could be a better proxy for dealing with challenges. It was also predicted that self-complexity would be a protective factor by decreasing the importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced for a self-aspect. This was not supported. In both studies, higher self-complexity was associated with higher importance of and sense of incompleteness experienced without a self-aspect, which is the opposite of what was predicted. Further, there was some indication of a potential gender difference in these effects, although the gender findings were inconsistent throughout. People value what contributes to their identity, and one aspect of this could be diversity. Greater importance placed on self-aspects and a heightened sense of incompleteness experienced without them may reflect having an appreciation for a diverse sense of self.

Anxious Attachment as a Risk Factor

There was no support for the prediction that anxious attachment increases inclusion-of-other-in-the-self biases. Similar to self-complexity, the only moderation model tested was for the outcome of evaluation for romantic partners, for which anxious attachment was not a significant predictor. It is important to note that the internal reliability of the measure used to assess anxious attachment was poor, which could have influenced the quality of data collected and, consequently, the results. A meta-analysis of 564 studies indicated that the Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised had an average internal reliability of .90 for the anxious attachment

subscale, which was the largest internal reliability in five different measures of attachment style observed (Graham & Unterschute, 2015). Additionally, this meta-analysis also demonstrated that the internal reliability of this measure was largely unaffected by a variety of sample characteristics (Graham & Unterschute, 2015). In Study 2, correlational findings indicated that greater anxious attachment decreases positive evaluations of romantic partners, which is the opposite of what was expected. However, it is consistent with some studies that have demonstrated that people with a higher anxious attachment tend to have a pessimistic bias and are more sensitive to threats to the relationship (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2019). Additionally, some studies seem to provide evidence that anxious attachment decreases rather than increases the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and other constructs, such as commitment (Park et al., 2019). In Study 2, correlational findings also provided some support that anxious attachment increases inclusions-of-other-in-the-self biases. Specifically, shared guilt experienced for the transgressions of a romantic partner. This is consistent with some studies that have shown that low self-esteem, which is characteristic of anxious attachment, increases feelings of responsibility for a romantic partner's negative mood (Bellavia & Murray, 2003). It was also predicted that the mechanism by which anxious attachment serves as a risk factor is by increasing the importance of self-aspects and the sense of incompleteness without a self-aspect. This was not supported.

Implications

This investigation aims to set the groundwork for developing prevention and intervention programs for intimate partner violence. Specifically, these would be strength-based programs around the concept of self-complexity. Strength-based methods are focused on increasing people's strengths to assist them in achieving their goals and can be implemented at different

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levels (i.e., cultural, family, community, and individual; Asay et al., 2016; Anand, 2020). A meta-analysis of positive interventions in clinical settings highlighted the effectiveness of strength-based methods in psychotherapy (Flückiger et al., 2023). Strength-based interventions have been recommended to be used with victims/survivors of domestic violence (Gunjan Chandhok and Meenu Anand). Further, across various cultures, it has been demonstrated that strength-based methods are successful in dealing with negative outcomes of intimate partner violence and empowering people to leave abusive relationships (Asay et al., 2016: Sharei et al., 2023). However, several more steps must be taken before reaching that stage. These studies are the initial steps in establishing proof of concept. In the next section, important future directions will be detailed, and more information will be provided on strength-based methods.

Future Directions

Due to the mixed support received for some of these predictions, conceptual replications are necessary. The overall findings indicate that these predictions are promising. However, the findings also suggest that the methodology, measures, and analytical approaches can be improved. Future studies should explore improved methods for implementing the card sorting task to assess self-complexity. Although our pilot data indicated that this task was easy to complete and could be implemented in an online format, there were multiple complications. Further, there are notable differences between the administration format (online vs. in-person) and score calculation (automated vs. non-automated) that are important to consider. First, in an online format (vs. in-person), there is a limit to the guidance that participants receive, which leaves more room for errors to occur. Additionally, the online implementation of this task requires a researcher to anticipate how many self-aspects a person will report. This is problematic because there will be a limit placed on how many self-aspects a participant can

report. Thus, potentially artificially reducing the number of self-aspects and self-complexity scores (Smyth et al., 2022). A comparison between administration formats based on information reported in multiple studies seems to indicate that there is a greater range of number of self-aspects and self-complexity scores when the task is administered in-person (Linville, 1985; Linville, 1987; Luo et al., 2009; McConnell, 2005; Smyth et al., 2022). In this dissertation, the range of self-aspects and self-complexity scores was lower not only because the task was administered online but also due to the focus on only self-aspects related to social roles. Second, calculating self-complexity scores with an automated tool (vs. non-automated) also imposes some limitations. Although the automated tools allow for any list of attributes to be used, the list of attributes must be the same for all participants. This means that self-reported traits outside of the provided list to participants can't be included. Overall, the in-person implementation of the card-sorting task better captures the nuances between participants, whereas the online implementation limits that individuality. One potential change to the card-sorting task, to facilitate its administration and score calculation, could be eliminating the need for participants to allocate traits to each self-aspect. Instead, participants could indicate the overlap between self-aspects through a pictorial assessment, similar to the method used in the Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self Scale. Although this method would also be limiting compared to the in-person administration of this task, it might be more appealing to researchers due to its ease and quick administration. Therefore, encouraging the study of self-complexity. The suggestion is for researchers to use this simplified version of the card-sorting task first to establish proof of concept and then use the original card-sorting task to build on those initial associations. Validation of this new method will be necessary and a valuable line of research to pursue.

Future directions also include doing a longitudinal study to test the ideas presented in this investigation. There are two main reasons to do this. First, it is important to note that research findings may differ depending on whether the variables are manipulated or measured. In addition to the discrepancies noted in this investigation, differences in findings between manipulated and measured variables have been found in some of my original work on other psychological concepts. In a study on fear of being single, there were null findings based on the condition participants were assigned to (i.e., high in fear of being single vs. low in fear of being single). It is important to note that this manipulation was pilot tested prior to its implementation and had been found to be effective. However, my predicted findings emerged when, instead of using the manipulation as a predictor, we used self-reported scores on the Fear of Being Single Scale. Other relationship researchers attempting to manipulate fear of being single have not been successful in doing so, only finding that the manipulation was marginally significant (Spielmann & Cantarella, 2020). Similarly, one manipulation intended to induce high or low commitment also failed to be replicated (Finkel, 2016). A meta-analysis on manipulations used in social psychology indicated that best practices for creating, validating, and reporting manipulations are not common and that most manipulations are face valid at best (Chester & Lasko, 2021). The manipulations used in the original work and in this dissertation followed many of the practices suggested to create manipulations with strong construct validity (i.e., theory-driven, pilot-tested, within-participants design, random assignment, and manipulation checks). However, these manipulations have not been validated outside of this research laboratory. Another reason to conduct a longitudinal study is to observe the effects of inclusion-of-other-in-the-self as it naturally occurs in a romantic relationship. Time and related constructs are important in understanding psychological phenomena in relationships (Arriaga et al., 2019; Eastwick et al.,

2019). Observing a relationship at different time points can demonstrate how variables fluctuate and what factors are associated with those fluctuations. Further, it has been suggested that individual differences are better predictors of patterns of behavior than one-time events (Le et al., 2010). For instance, changes in the perceived commitment of one's romantic partner across time can be used to predict romantic dissolution (Arriaga et al., 2006). Further, those changes in commitment are connected to specific life events (i.e., pregnancy; Dailey, 2013). Arguably, inclusion-of-other-in-the-self would increase with the length of a romantic relationship, thus amplifying any of its effects. Prior work from our laboratory and by other researchers have not found a relationship between inclusion-of-other-in-the-self and the longevity of a relationship (Aron et al., 1992). However, various factors can cause fluctuations in the connection between romantic partners, and those that increase (decrease) inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (IOS) will also increase (decrease) these biases. Aron and colleagues (2022) provide an extensive review of these factors.

Future studies should test and compare different mechanisms by which inclusion-of-other-in-the-self results in these biases. Part of the rationale proposed in this investigation is that self-biases are extended to romantic partners through inclusion-of-other-in-the-self, but this has not been directly tested. Future studies should also test other features of self-complexity. For instance, research has shown that there are some contexts in which higher self-complexity is counterproductive. Specifically, if there is a lack of control over the self-aspects. It would also be interesting to test what self-control over a self-aspect entails. In the context of an abusive relationship, for instance, is self-control related to knowing how to manage an abusive partner (i.e., knowing not to wear specific pieces of clothing), or is it only related to not being with an abusive partner?

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Additional studies that replicate and extend these findings will be necessary. For instance, one critical next step will be to focus on more severe transgressions resembling intimate partner violence. The closer we align the research to the actual problem, the better we can assess its real-world applicability. Translational research focuses on data-driven methods to apply research findings into practice. The need for translational research on intimate partner violence is particularly important and strongly encouraged by large funding agencies (Bender, 2017). The development and implementation of an intervention based on self-complexity will adhere to established guidelines to work with low-income, marginalized communities when using strength-based methods (Hamby, 2022). For instance, one of these guidelines involves identifying/measuring strengths related to belonging to a marginalized group (Hamby, 2022). The background and experiences related to having a marginalized identity could give rise to strengths that those with privileged backgrounds might not have (Silverman et al., 2023). Even when not ill-intentioned, working from a deficit perspective (i.e., focusing on what groups lack) can be detrimental to marginalized groups as it may increase feelings of helplessness (Gonzalez-Mendez & Hamby, 2021). In contrast, strength-based methods are empowering. Translational research requires researchers to go beyond merely providing empirical data and to take on additional roles. For instance, researchers should collaborate with organizations to help sustain these programs and raise community awareness, thereby bridging the gap between research and practice (Werner-Seidler et al., 2016; Curran et al., 2011; Kershaw & Rossa-Roccor, 2024).

Conclusion

This investigation aimed to test negative relationship outcomes of a unique way of experiencing closeness (i.e., inclusion-of-other-in-the-self) and test variables that decrease or increase these outcomes. Both studies confirmed that higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self

influences the evaluation of romantic partners to be more positive. However, there was mixed support that inclusion-of-other-in-the-self influences the evaluations of romantic partners' transgressions to be less negative and no support that it influences shared guilt experienced for the transgressions of romantic partners. Lastly, self-complexity and anxious attachment did not significantly moderate the association between inclusion-of-other-in-the self and these biases, indicating no protective or risk effects. These findings highlight the need for replication.

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Appendix A

Online Dating Profiles

Description: Participants were first asked to complete an online dating profile by responding to several question prompts (See Dating Profile – Participant). Then participants were asked to review four different online dating profiles. The online dating profiles showed the same question prompts the participant answered and included responses to those question prompts. Question prompts were the same across online dating profiles, but the answers were different. Half of the profiles had answers that were high in self-disclosure and thus were expected to induce higher inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (See High Inclusion Profile). Half of the profiles had answers that were low in self-disclosure and thus were expected to induce low inclusion-of-other-in-the-self (See Low Inclusion Profile). No photographs of people were included in the profiles, but the information was paired with a name so participants could make a connection to the information and a specific person. The silhouette was change from a man to a woman depending on the gender and sexuality of the participant.

Dating Profile - Participant

Instructions: Enter a response to the following question prompts. Your responses should be about situations/events/memories that you are willing to share with others. Your responses to these question prompts will be shown to the four women or men in your group who will be reviewing your profile. Likewise, you will be reviewing their profile and reading their responses to these question prompts. Therefore, you are encouraged to avoid vague and superficial responses. You will have 10 minutes to complete your profile.

For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

[Text Entry Response]

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

[Text Entry Response]

What is your most terrible memory?

[Text Entry Response]

If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?

[Text Entry Response]

What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner?

[Text Entry Response]

Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share…"

[Text Entry Response]

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?

[Text Entry Response]

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Dating Profiles - Premeditated

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Instructions: During this session, you will be shown the dating profiles of the women/men in your group. Please review their profiles carefully and read all responses fully. After each profile, you will be asked to report on your perceived connection with the woman/man in the dating profile among other things.

The profile will be on the screen for at least 1 minute. After a minute has passed, you will be able to move on. However, you can stay on the same page reading the profile for as long as you need. Then you will be shown the questions you must answer.

High Inclusion Profile

GABRIEL

For what in your life do you feel most grateful? I am grateful for having a family who loves and cares about me. I am also grateful for the love and endless support I receive from my friends. They have become my second family. I can't imagine going through life without them.

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be? I would like the ability to teleport myself anywhere I want. Teleporting would give me the opportunity to travel around the world, see the beauty that this world has to offer, and experience new cultures.

What is your most terrible memory? My most terrible memory is receiving a call from a family member to inform me that my mother had died. For months, I felt anxious every time I received a call. I was always worried that someone was calling me to tell me something bad had happened again.

If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why? I would attempt to experience life more. I would try to do the things that I keep saying I will but had been reluctant to do like traveling on my own. I would also reconsider my priorities. I would spend more time making memories with my loved ones.

What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner? My ex-boyfriend and I joined a volleyball tournament for school. He wasn't good at playing volleyball and he was making us lose all the time. I told him that he was useless to the team and that he looked dumb when playing. He ended up quitting the team.

Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share…" My life. I want to find someone that I can share my successes and struggles with and someone that feels they can do the same with me.

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet? My biggest regret would be not telling my family and friends how much I love them and how much better my life is because of them. I think I assume that they already know, but I should express my feelings to them more often.

High Inclusion Profile

MARIO

For what in your life do you feel most grateful? I feel grateful for having good health. My best friend has health complications, and it made me appreciate being able to live life without being limited. I know my friend can enjoy life, but they also have some days filled with pain.

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be? I would want to keep all my memories and remember them whenever I want. It would be

amazing to look back into my life with perfect memory. I would love to relive some of my happiest moments.

What is your most terrible memory? My most terrible memory is when my sister was in a car accident. She ended up being in coma for a couple of weeks. Thankfully, she woke up from the coma, but her recovery process was long. It was a hard time for our family emotionally and financially.

If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why? I would change having focused so much on school and my future rather than living in the moment. I have achieved a lot academically, but I have also lost valuable friendships along the way. I don't want to feel like I am missing out on other experiences.

What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner? My ex-boyfriend had a lot of acne. He was always purchasing products and trying new routines to control his acne. Even though I knew he felt embarrassed about his acne I would still call him a "crater face" in front of our friends and family.

Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share…" Anything that I am feeling or thinking without any fear of being judged. That's a special connection I hope to find with someone one day.

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet? I would regret not asking for forgiveness to people I have hurt in the past. I have not always been the best

friend, daughter, sister, or partner. I haven't asked for forgiveness yet, because it's hard to accept that I have been in the wrong.

Low Inclusion Profile

ALEJANDRO

For what in your life do you feel most grateful? That I am still alive.

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be? I would like the ability to fly or have super strength.

What is your most terrible memory? I don't feel comfortable sharing this. Sorry.

If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why? No. I like it how it is.

What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner? One of my ex-boyfriends wanted to celebrate our first month of being together by going out for dinner. I was upset with him that day, so I told him that the idea was ridiculous and that there was nothing to celebrate about being with him.

Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share…" My Food. I think it's delicious and I always make extra.

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet? My deepest secret. I haven't told people because it is a secret.

Low Inclusion Profile

ROBERTO

For what in your life do you feel most grateful? I have had a good life.

If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be? The ability to shapeshift. Through shapeshifting I could have other abilities.

What is your most terrible memory? When my grandfather died. We were close.

If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why? I don't want to think about dying.

What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner? My last boyfriend used to draw as a hobby. He got asked by a friend to draw a tattoo design. My ex-boyfriend was excited and texted me pictures of the designs he had created. I told him that his designs were amateur at best, and he ended up telling his friend that he couldn't do it.

Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share…" My house. I live alone and I feel lonely at times.

If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet? I rather not discuss this. My regrets are for me to know.

Appendix B

Self-Complexity

Instructions: In this part of the study, we are interested in how you describe yourself. Who you are is a combination of multiple self-aspects (i.e., identities). Self-aspects can be roles (e.g., student), relationships (e.g., girlfriend/boyfriend), and/or goals (e.g., professional career).

There can be many self-aspects that make up who you are. However, only some of those self-aspects **meaningfully** contribute to who you are. Take into consideration the two self-aspects below:

Student (who you are related to school or school activities)

Driver (who you are related to driving a vehicle)

You probably identify with both self-aspects because you are a student and more than likely drive a car. Nonetheless, being a student is more likely to **meaningfully** contribute to who you are because it is a significant part of your day-to-day activities (e.g., attending courses, doing homework, studying), whereas being a driver is something you do daily but has no big influence on your life. Therefore, in this task, you would list 'Student' but not 'Driver' as part of the self-aspects that describe who you are. Unless being a driver (e.g., Uber Employee, Trucker) **meaningfully** contributes to how you view yourself as a person.

We would like you to take a couple of minutes to think of and identify the different self-aspects that **meaningfully** contribute to describing who you are. Please list at least one, but as many as you need, self-aspects.

Please do your best to avoid redundant self-aspects. For instance, being a daughter/son and/or a sister/brother can be broadly described as being a family member rather than listing them separately. Please also do your best to avoid listing individual attributes/traits (e.g., Shy, Kind) as self-aspects. In the second part of this task, you will have the opportunity to assign attributes/traits to the self-aspects (e.g., Student) that you report in this part of the task.

Please start thinking of all the self-aspects that **meaningfully** contribute to who you are.

Feel free to grab a piece of paper and a pencil to write down all the self-aspects that **meaningfully** describe you, prior to you entering the number of self-aspects you want to report.

To complete this task, select the number of self-aspects that you want to report. Then, you will be redirected to a different page where you will be able to write a brief label (e.g., "student") or description (e.g., "me at school") for each self-aspect.

How many self-aspects do you want to report?

- Drop down menu (Options 1 to 10)

After the participants have created a list of different self-aspects.

Instructions: You will now be shown the self-aspects that you listed and will be asked to assign specific attributes to them.

For each self-aspect please select the attributes which **best describe** how you behave, act, or feel when you think of this self-aspect of yourself.

For instance, if your self-aspect is 'student' you might choose the attributes: hardworking, disorganized, independent, and intelligent.

You will be shown 60 attributes for each self-aspect. You can assign attributes that are positive, negative, or a combination of both to each self-aspect. You will also have the option to enter your own attributes if the list of attributes available does not include an attribute that you think is important to describe your self-aspect.

You may **use as many** attributes as you need and **you can repeat** the same attributes in different self-aspects as often as you need.

For each self-aspect reported participants were asked

Please select the attributes which best describe how you behave, act, or feel when you think of this self-aspect of yourself. Your self-aspect is [SELF-ASPECT]

Positive

1. Lovable
2. Outgoing
3. Brave
4. Comfortable
5. Responsible
6. Hardworking
7. Helpful
8. Organized
9. Mature
10. Skillful
11. Interested
12. Energetic

13. Friendly

14. Respectful

15. Honest

16. Successful

17. Humble

18. Fun and Entertaining

19. Optimistic

20. Giving

21. Needed

22. Independent

23. Intelligent

24. Capable

25. Loyal

26. Communicative

27. Happy

28. Creative

29. Confident

30. Loving

Negative

31. Stubborn

32. Weary

33. Jealous

34. Worthless

35. Self-centered

36. Arrogant

37. Irritable

38. Shallow

39. Incompetent

40. Uncomfortable

41. Rude

42. Selfish

43. Irresponsible

44. Disagreeing

45. Insecure

46. Isolated

47. Tense

48. Indecisive

49. Lazy

50. Moody

51. Gullible

52. Unloved

53. Vulgar

54. Like a failure

55. Aggressive

56. Disorganized

57. Hopeless

58. Devious

59. Inferior

60. Immature

61. If you want to include an additional attribute, please enter it here.

62. If you want to include an additional attribute, please enter it here.

63. If you want to include an additional attribute, please enter it here.

64. If you want to include an additional attribute, please enter it here.

65. If you want to include an additional attribute, please enter it here.

For every self-aspect, participants will also be asked:

1. How important is [SELF-ASPECT] to your overall sense of self?

1 Not at All Close	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very Close

2. How incomplete they would feel without [SELF-ASPECT]?

1 Not at All Close	2	3	4	5	6	7 Very Close

Appendix C

Experiences in Close Relationships Short Form

Instructions: The following statements concern how you feel in romantic relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it. Mark your answer using the following rating scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neither Agree nor Disagree*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

1. **It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.**
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
5. **I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.**
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
8. **I do not often worry about being abandoned.**
9. **I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.**
10. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

Scoring: Anxious= 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12   Avoidant= 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11
**Bold:** Reverse Coded

Appendix D

Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale

Study 1

Instructions: Please select the set of circles that best represent how close you anticipate feeling towards the person in this dating profile. The circle labeled self represents you and the circle labeled other represents the person in this dating profile. The greater the overlap in circles, the closer you anticipate feeling towards the person in this dating profile.

Study 2

Instructions: Please select the set of circles that best represent how close you feel to your romantic partner. The circle labeled self represents you and the circle labeled other represents your romantic partner. The greater the overlap in circles, the closer you feel toward your romantic partner.
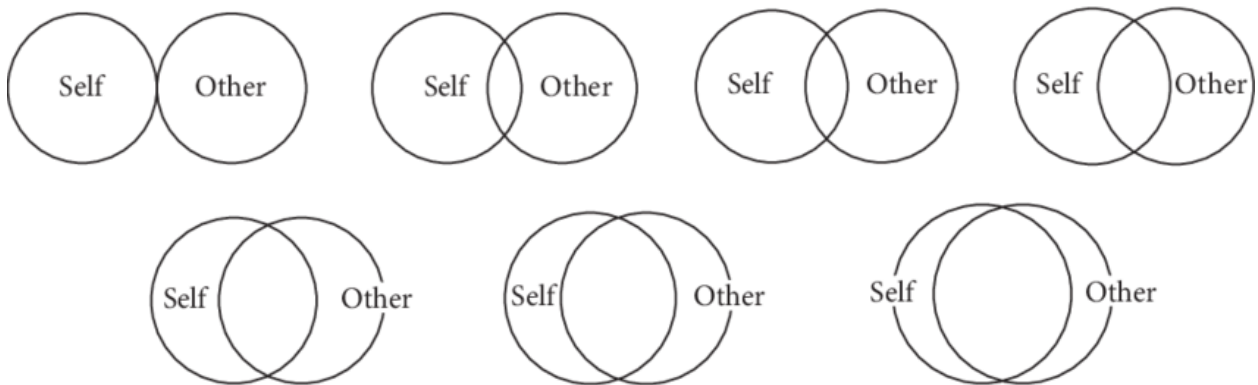
Appendix E

Evaluation Task

Study 1

Instructions: Rate your agreement with the following statements.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	*Disagree*	*Slightly Disagree*	*Neither Agree nor Disagree*	*Slightly Agree*	*Agree*	*Strongly Agree*

1. I would match [NAME] on a dating application.
2. [NAME] is a desirable romantic partner.
3. I believe that [NAME] would treat me well.
4. I would be satisfied in a romantic relationship with [NAME]
5. I can see myself with [NAME] in a long-term relationship (i.e., a relationship that lasts for years).

Study 2

Instructions: How well do the following traits describe you?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Characteristic			*Neutral*			*Completely Characteristic*

1. Kind and affectionate
2. Patient
3. Understanding
4. **Critical and Judgmental (Negative)**
5. **Controlling and Dominant (Negative)**

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6. **Distant (Negative)**

7. **Complaining (Negative)**

8. Self-assured

9. Intelligent

10. Socially Competent

11. Physically Attractive

12. Emotionally Stable

Bold: Reversed-Coded

Appendix F

Perception Task

Study 1

Instructions: You will now be asked to report on your perception of some of Gabriela's answers in the online dating profile.

You have been randomly assigned to review two of the question prompts for all the women whose profiles you were shown. Other members of your group have been assigned different prompts.

Example

Question Prompt: What is the worst thing you have ever done regarding a romantic partner?

Answer: My ex-boyfriend and I joined a volleyball tournament for school. He wasn't good at playing volleyball and he was making us lose all the time. I told him that he was useless to the team and that he looked dumb when playing. He ended up quitting the team.

1. How negative do you think this behavior is?

1 *Not at all negative*	2	3	4 *Neutral*	5	6	7 *Very negative*

2. How acceptable do you think this behavior is?

1 Not at all acceptable	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very acceptable

3. How likely is it that [NAME] would behave like this with you?

1 Not at all Likely	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Likely

4. How characteristic do you believe that this behavior is of [NAME]?

1 Not at all Characteristic	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Characteristic

5. How responsible do you think [NAME] is for his behavior?

1 Not at all Responsible	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Responsible

6. Overall, how likely are you to agree that this is a good question prompt to include in online dating profiles?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			*Neutral*			*Strongly Agree*

The following will be included to hide the real purpose of the study.

Question Prompt: For what in your life do you feel most grateful?

Answer: I am grateful for having a family who loves and cares about me. I am also grateful for the love and endless support I receive from my friends. They have become my second family. I can't imagine going through life without them.

1. How relatable is this response?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Relatable			*Neutral*			*Very Relatable*

2. How thoughtful is this response?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all Thoughtful			*Neutral*			*Very Thoughtful*

3. How likely is it that [NAME] would be grateful for having you?

1 Not at all Likely	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Likely

4. How characteristic do you believe being grateful is of [NAME]?

1 Not at all Characteristic	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Characteristic

5. How likely is it that [NAME] gets along with others?

1 Not at all Likely	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Likely

6. Overall, how likely are you to agree that this is a good question prompt to include in online dating profiles?

1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Strongly Agree

Study 2

Instructions: For this writing task, please recall a transgression your romantic partner did. Specifically, we want you to think of a transgression that meets the following criteria:

- It must be a transgression that your romantic partner committed against you.

- It must be a transgression that is the most memorable to you.

- It must be a transgression that has been the most painful to you.

A transgression is defined as "when your partner enacted a negative behavior towards you. For example, he/she did something that violated your expectations of how someone should behave in a relationship."

Please take 5 minutes to write below with as much detail as possible, what the transgression was.

[Text Entry Response]

After the writing task is over.

Instructions: Please answer the following questions while thinking of the transgression that you wrote about.

1. How long ago did this transgression happen?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Less than a week ago	*A week ago*	*A month ago*	*Less than half a year ago*	*A year ago*	*Two years ago*	*Three or more years ago*

2. How negative do you think this transgression is?

1 Not at all negative	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very negative

3. How acceptable do you think this transgression is?

1 Not at all acceptable	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very acceptable

4. How frequently does your romantic partner engage in this transgression?

1 This is the first time it happens	2	3	4	5	6	7 It happens all the time

5. How characteristic is this transgression of your romantic partner?

1 Not at all Characteristic	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Very Characteristic

6. How severe do you think this transgression is?

1 Not at all severe	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely severe

7. How much did the transgression affect you when it happened?

1 Not at all	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely

8. How much does the transgression still affect you now?

1 Not at all	2	3	4 Neutral	5	6	7 Extremely

Appendix G

Demographic Form

Study 1

Age: _____

Ethnicity:

- 1 = African American

- 2 = Caucasian

- 3 = Native American

- 4 = Asian

- 5 = Hispanic

- 6 = Other (Please Specify)

What is your relationship status?

- 1 = Single

- 2 = Married

- 3 = In a Relationship

- 4 = Widowed

- 5 = Divorced

- Other (Please Specify)

Do you have an active online dating profile?

- 1 = Yes | 2 = No

If participant responds yes, he/she will see the following question:

Please indicate the dating applications where you have an active online dating profile:

- 1 = Tinder

- 2 = Bumble

- 3 = Facebook Dating

- 4 = OkCupid

- 5 = Match.com

- 6 = Eharmony

- 7 = Coffee Meets Bagel

- 8 = Hinge

- 9 = Not Listed (Please Specify)

If participant responds no, he/she will see the following question:

Have you ever had an online dating profile?

- 1 = Yes | 2 = No

If participant responds yes, he/she will see the following question:

Please indicate the dating applications where you had an online dating profile:

- 1 = Tinder

- 2 = Bumble

- 3 = Facebook Dating

- 4 = OkCupid

- 5 = Match.com

- 6 = Eharmony

- 7 = Coffee Meets Bagel

- 8 = Hinge

- 9 = Not Listed (Please Specify)

Gender:

- 1 = Male

- 2 = Female

- 3 = Transgender Male

- 4 = Transgender Female

- 5 = Non-Binary

- 6 = Prefer not to answer

- 7 = Not Listed (Please Specify)

Who do you feel the most attracted to? Your answer to this question will redirect you to either women's responses/dating profiles or men's responses/dating profiles.

- 1 = Women | 2 = Men

Study 2

Gender:

- 1 = Male

- 2 = Female

- 3 = Transgender Male

- 4 = Transgender Female

- 5 = Non-Binary

- 6 = Prefer not to say

- 7 = Not Listed (Please Specify)

Age: _____

Ethnicity:

- 1 = African American

- 2 = Caucasian

- 3 = Asian

- 4 = Hispanic

- 5 = Native American

- 6 = Other (Please Specify)

What is your relationship status?

- 1 = Single

- 2 = Married

- 3 = In a Relationship

- 4 = Widowed

- 5 = Divorced

- 6 = Other (Please Specify)

What is your sexuality?

- 1 = Heterosexual

- 2 = Homosexual

- 3 = Bisexual

- 4 = Pansexual

- 5 = Asexual

- 6 = Not Listed (Please Specify)

It is important for this study that you are in a romantic relationship. You will receive credit regardless of your answer to this question, so please be honest. Are you really in a romantic relationship?

- 1 = Yes | 2 = No

It is important for this study that you are single. You will receive credit regardless of your answer to this question, so please be honest. Are you really single?

- 1 = Yes | 2 = No

Have you ever experienced any form of abuse in a past romantic relationship? Different types of abuse include but are not limited to the following:

- **Physical (e.g., punching, biting)**

- **Emotional/Verbal (e.g., threats, insults)**

- **Financial (e.g., forbidding you from working, monitoring what you buy)**

- **Sexual (e.g., insisting on sex without a condom, pressure to have sex or engage in sexual acts)**

- **Digital (e.g., pressuring to share account passwords, using spyware to monitor your activities)**

- **Stalking (e.g., following you)**
  - 1 = Yes | 2 = No

Appendix H

List of Resources

The University of Texas at El Paso

- Counseling Center
  - **Address:** 202 Union West, 500 W University El Paso, Texas 79968
  - **Website:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/counsel/
- Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education (CARE) Office
  - **Address:** Campbell Building, 1101 N Campbell Street, El Paso, Texas 79902
  - **Website:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/care/
- Campus Police
  - **Address:** 3118 Sun Bowl Drive, El Paso, Texas 79968
  - **Website:** https://www.utep.edu/police/
- Department of Recreational Sports (Self-Defense Class)
  - **Address:** 3450 Sun Bowl Drive, El Paso, Texas 79902
  - **Website:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/rsd/

Hotlines

- Love is Respect (Call: 1.866.331.9474 or Text: "loveis" to 22522)
- National Domestic Violence Hotline (Call: 1.800.799.7233)
- Center Against Sexual and Family Violence (Call: 593-7300)

Help Centers

- Center Against Sexual and Family Violence
  - **Address:** 580 Giles Road, El Paso, TX

Websites

- Love is Respect (https://www.loveisrespect.org/for-yourself/contact-us/)
- Center Against Sexual and Family Violence (https://casfv.org/)

- National Domestic Violence Hotline (https://www.thehotline.org/help/)

Lista de Recursos

The University of Texas at El Paso

- Counseling Center
    - **Dirección:** 202 Union West, 500 W University El Paso, Texas 79968
    - **Sitio Web:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/counsel/
- Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education (CARE) Office
    - **Dirección:** Campbell Building, 1101 N Campbell Street, El Paso, Texas 79902
    - **Sitio Web:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/care/
- Campus Police
    - **Dirección:** 3118 Sun Bowl Drive, El Paso, Texas 79968
    - **Sitio Web:** https://www.utep.edu/police/
- Department of Recreational Sports (Self-Defense Class)
    - **Dirección:** 3450 Sun Bowl Drive, El Paso, Texas 79902
    - **Sitio Web:** https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/rsd/

Líneas Directas

- Love is Respect (Llama: 1.866.331.9474)

- Linea Nacional contra la Violencia Domestica (Llama: 1.800.779.7233)

- Centro Contra la Violencia Sexual y Familiar (Llama: 915.593.7300 o 1.800.727.0511)

Centros de Ayuda

- Centro Contra la Violencia Sexual y Familiar

    - **Dirección:** 580 Giles Road, El Paso, TX

Sitios Web

- Love is Respect (https://espanol.loveisrespect.org/)

- Centro Contra la Violencia Sexual y Familiar (https://es.casfv.org/)

- Linea Nacional contra la Violencia Domestica (https://espanol.thehotline.org/)

Appendix I

Shared Guilt

Instructions: Please rate your agreement with the following items:

1 *Strongly Disagree*	2	3	4 *Neutral*	5	6	7 *Strongly Agree*

1. "I feel guilty about my romantic partner's actions"
2. "I feel responsible for my romantic partner's actions"
3. "I feel others would judge me based on my romantic partner's actions."
4. "I feel that this happened because of something that I did or didn't do"
5. "I feel that this happened because of the kind of person that I am"

Open-ended Question

Please list the factors that you believe lead to this transgression happening. You can list up to six factors that you feel responsible for. You can also list up to six factors that you feel your romantic partner is responsible for. Only list factors that you truly feel responsible for or that you truly feel your romantic partner was responsible for. If you don't feel responsible for any factors that lead to the transgression, please write N/A in the boxes. If you don't feel that your romantic partner was responsible for any factors that lead to the transgression, please write N/A in the boxes. Only use as many boxes as you need.

Example:

You	Your Romantic Partner
I gave him/her the cold shoulder	He arrived late

	He forgot the pickup the dog's food

Appendix J

Codebook for Transgressions

Table of Codes

CODE TO ENTER IN EXCEL	MEANING
1	**Lack of or Violation of Trust (No Subtheme)**
1.1	Infidelity
1.2	Deception
1.3	Privacy Invasion
2	**Lack of or Violation of Boundaries (No Subtheme)**
2.1	Emotional Boundaries
2.2	Physical Boundaries
2.3	Lack of Boundaries
3	**Lack of Respect**
3.1	Beliefs and Interests
3.2	Feelings and Needs
3.3	External Parties
4	**Poor Communication**
4.1	Lack of communication
4.2	Disrespectful Communication
5	**Unhealthy/Abusive Behaviors**
5.1	Verbal Abuse
5.2	Emotional Abuse
5.3	Physical Abuse
5.4	Controlling Behaviors
5.5	Jealousy
6	**Neglect and Indifference**
6.1	Lack of Quality Time
6.2	Lack of Emotional or Physical Support
7	**Other**

7.1	Other Topics
7.2	No Transgressions
7.3	Ex-Partner Transgressions

Codebook

Theme 1: Lack of or Violation of Trust

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that show a lack of trust or violate the trust within the relationship.

➢ **Subtheme 1: Infidelity** – Discussing instances of confirmed adultery or cheating.

➢ **Subtheme 2: Deception** – Discussing instances of deception or concealment of the truth.

➢ **Subtheme 3: Privacy Invasion** – Discussing instances of privacy violation or intrusion.

Theme 2: Lack of or Violation of Boundaries

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that show a lack of boundaries or violate established boundaries in the relationship.

➢ **Subtheme 1: Emotional Boundaries** – Discussing instances where emotional boundaries were crossed.

➢ **Subtheme 2: Physical Boundaries** – Discussing instances where physical boundaries were crossed.

➢ **Subtheme 3: Lack of Boundaries** – Discussing instances where emotional or physical boundaries were not formed and implemented in the relationship or with others.

Theme 3: Lack of Respect

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that show a lack of respect towards them or the relationship.

➢ **Subtheme 1: Beliefs and Interests** – Discussing instances when their beliefs and interests were dismissed by their partner.

- ➢ **Subtheme 2: Feelings and Needs** – Discussing instances when their feelings and needs were dismissed by their partner.

- ➢ **Subtheme 3: External Parties** – Discussing instances when there was a lack of respect from someone external to the relationship.

Theme 4: Poor Communication

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that show poor communication skills.

- ➢ **Subtheme 1: Lack of communication** – Discussing instances when their partner failed to communicate feelings, thoughts or behaviors.

- ➢ **Subtheme 2: Disrespectful Communication** – Discussing instances when their partner becomes disrespectful or demeaning when communicating with them.

Theme 5: Unhealthy/Abusive Behaviors

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that cause psychological or physical harm.

- ➢ **Subtheme 1: Verbal Abuse** – Discussing instances when their partner became verbally aggressive.

- ➢ **Subtheme 2: Emotional Abuse** – Discussing instances when their partner manipulates or mistreats them.

- ➢ **Subtheme 3: Physical Abuse** – Discussing instances when their partner used physical force.

- ➢ **Subtheme 4: Controlling Behavior** – Discussing instances when their partner became possessive or controlling.

- ➢ **Subtheme 5: Jealousy** – Discussing instances when their partner suspects them or others.

Theme 6: Neglect and Indifference

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that show a neglect for or lack of effort in the relationship.

- ➢ **Subtheme 1: Lack of Quality Time** – Discussing instances when their partner did not designate time for them or the relationship.

- ➢ **Subtheme 2: Lack of Emotional or Physical Support** – Discussing instances when their partner failed to provide emotional or physical support.

Theme 7: Other

Description: Participants discuss behaviors that do not fall in any of the other themes.

- ➢ **Subtheme 1: Other Topics** – Discussing instances of transgressions that do not fall in any of the other themes.

- ➢ **Subtheme 2: No Transgression** – Discussing that there have not been any transgressions in the relationship.

- ➢ **Subtheme 3: Ex-Partner Transgressions** – Discussing instances of transgressions that did not involve their current partner.

Curriculum Vita

Jacqueline Lechuga received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology (*summa cum laude*) with a double minor in honors and biological sciences from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in May 2017. Jacqueline continued her graduate education at UTEP. She earned a master's degree in Experimental Psychology in 2020 and a graduate certificate in Quantitative Methods in Psychology in 2021. Jacqueline investigates various aspects of intimate partner violence, including attraction to harmful romantic partners, the tolerance of abusive behavior within romantic relationships, and the development of effective prevention and/or intervention strategies. Her secondary lines of research are focused on child abuse and neglect, education, and sustainability.

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