

TEMPORAL CONSTRUAL EFFECTS ON RELATIONSHIP GOAL PURSUIT

by

LAURA E. BUFFARDI

(Under the Direction of W. Keith Campbell)

ABSTRACT

To fulfill belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1998) and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1995) needs, individuals pursue relationship goals. Temporal distance from goals focuses attention on goal-relevant features while decreased temporal distance focuses attention on goal-irrelevant features (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Thus, it was predicted that individuals would approach relationship goals in the distant-future but avoid them in the near-future. Two important relationship goals were examined: (1) bringing up a relationship conflict with one's partner; and (2) meeting a potential mate. A series of four studies show that as temporal distance decreases: (a) reported likelihood of pursuing hypothetical relationship goals decreases, (b) the preference to pursue self-relevant relationship goal decreases, and (c) perceived desirability and feasibility of relationship goal pursuit decreases. Finally, we show that distant-future relationship goals are cognitively represented by high-level (i.e. goal-relevant) thoughts while near-future relationship goals are represented by low-level (i.e. goal-irrelevant) thoughts.

INDEX WORDS: Relationships, Temporal Construal, Goals, Approach-Avoidance, Decision Making

TEMPORAL CONSTRUAL EFFECTS ON RELATIONSHIP GOAL PURSUIT

by

LAURA E. BUFFARDI

B.S., New York University, 2004

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2006

© 2006

Laura E. Buffardi

All Rights Reserved

TEMPORAL CONSTRUAL EFFECTS ON RELATIONSHIP GOAL PURSUIT

by

LAURA E. BUFFARDI

Major Professor: W. Keith Campbell

Committee: Leonard L. Martin
Victoria C. Plaut

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Ali Boggs, Kymberlee Burger, Danielle Cherico, Kyle Coghlan, Betsy Crowe, Michaela Gonzalez, Lindsay Hooper, Meghan McNulty, and Catherine Proctor for their assistance with data collection.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Approach-Avoidance.....	1
Relationship Decision Making.....	2
Construal Level Theory.....	4
The Present Research	5
STUDY 1	7
Method.....	7
Results	8
Brief Discussion	9
STUDY 2	10
Study 2a.....	10
Method.....	11
Results	12
Study 2b.....	13
Method.....	13
Results	15
Brief Discussion	15

STUDY 3	16
Study 3a.....	17
Method.....	17
Results	19
Study 3b.....	20
Method.....	20
Results	22
Brief Discussion	23
STUDY 4	24
Study 4a.....	24
Method.....	24
Results	26
Study 4b.....	28
Method.....	28
Results	31
Brief Discussion	32
GENERAL DISCUSSION	33
Future Directions.....	35
REFERENCES	37

INTRODUCTION

To fulfill the universal needs of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968; Bowlby, 1969), relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and intimacy (Reis, 1990), we pursue relationship goals. These goals vary from person to person depending on his relational status from finding a mate, to maintaining a successful partnership, to ending a failing one. Universally it has been shown that being part of a successful partnership is associated with a variety of benefits for individuals. Social support and companionship has been shown to buffer the effects of life stressors (Rook, 1987). Gable, Reis, & Impett (2004) have shown that sharing positive life events with one's partner makes the psychological effects of the event even more positive. Marriage may be related to health benefits (Keicolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001).

Despite the multitude of positive outcomes associated with meaningful romantic relationships, relationship goals are not always approached with enthusiasm when it comes time to take action toward achieving the goal. Individuals seem to have an optimistic, approach orientation towards pursuing relationship goals in the distant-future. Consider, for example, the college student who convinces himself, "I'll get her number at the end of the semester," and the discontented wife who promises herself, "Next time this problem comes up between us, I'll bring it up for discussion." When it comes to actually asking for the phone number or bringing up the relationship problem, however, past research shows avoidance tendencies will likely take hold.

Approach-Avoidance

Relationship goal pursuit fits Lewin (1936) and Miller's (1959) model of approach-avoidance conflicts. In such interpersonal situations, there are often alternative actions (on

inactions) that contain both desirable and undesirable characteristics to choose among, which results in certain amount of distress. A vacillation between desirable aspects of an alternative (i.e. getting an attractive classmate's phone number, resolving a conflict with one's husband) creates movement towards that alternative, which, in turn, increases the negative psychological force associated with the alternative's undesirable aspects (i.e. face the possibility of rejection, start an argument). Lewin (1951) posited that these attracting and repelling psychological forces vary in magnitude as a function of psychological distance from a goal.

While Lewin and Miller focused broadly on "psychological" distance, many researchers including, Nisan & Minkowich (1973), Ainslie (1975), and Mischel (1974), focused on time as a specific measure of the distance from a goal that both Lewin and Miller referenced in their respective theories of motivation. Their general hypothesis was that people prefer immediate rewards to delayed rewards. This causes individuals to approach a goal when it's desirable (when it's framed as psychologically distant) or to avoid a goal when the undesirable characteristics of goal pursuit are highlighted, that is, when it's framed as psychologically less distant.

Given past theories, we predict that when pursuing a relationship goal in the distant-future, its desirable qualities are enhanced. In the near-future, conversely, its undesirable features are highlighted. We will argue that this process produces an approach tendency when relationship goal pursuit is in the distant-future and an avoidance tendency it is in the near-future.

Relationship Decision Making

To achieve interpersonal goals, like other goals, a good deal of decision making must occur (Gollwitzer, Fujita, & Oettingen, 2005). A deliberate, planned set of actions must be decided upon and carried through in order to successfully achieve a relationship goal. For instance, in dating, to ask someone out for the first time, first one must decide whether or not to

strike up a conversation. They must decide whether or not to ask the individual to supply a means for contacting them in the future (e.g. a phone number or email address). Then they must decide if they will actually contact them, what they're going to say, and when the appropriate time to contact them is. The details involved with taking steps towards the goal can be daunting if the primary goal – to enjoy an evening with an attractive potential mate – gets lost sight of.

To guide them in the decision making processes on the path to relationship goal achievement, thousands of people read relationship self-help books worldwide (Kitchen, 2006; England, 2005). Here the lofty distant-future goals that most people have about interpersonal relations in their lives are broken down into step-by-step plans of action. For example, in Dutter's (1999) *The Shy Guy's Guide to Dating*, timid men are instructed on exactly what to say to hold the attention an attractive woman (at least temporarily):

Somewhat more effective lines deal with the specific setting that you're in. If you're in a club, any of the following lines will do: "Do you know what time this club closes?" "What time does the band go on?" "Do you know the name of the band?" (Even if there is a giant sign on the wall with the name of the band on it, ask this one anyway. For that matter, even if you are wearing a watch, don't let this stop you from asking a girl for the time. If she notices you have a watch, tell her you need the *correct* time. (p. 39)

In the bestselling book, *It's Called a Break-Up Because It's Broken*, women who are wallowing in despair that resulted from a recently dissolved partnership read concrete suggestions for moving on:

Run headfirst into your life. Fight back that urge to curl up in the fetal position, and fill your days with as much activity as you can tolerate. Call that old friend that you've been

meaning to talk to, download all your CDs to your iPod, or dust off that piano in the corner. (Behrendt & Ruotola-Behrendt, 2005, p 114).

The strength of these publications may be that they provide the reader with detailed strategies and motivation for going about achieving goals in their lives. Helping people make the leap from abstract thinking about a relationship goal to concrete thinking about how to achieve these goals may be just what the reader needs psychologically to make goal achievement a reality.

Construal Level Theory

Construal Level Theory (Trope & Liberman, 2003) presents a succinct explanation of the differences between abstract and concrete representations of relationship goals when the pursuit of the goals is in an individual's distant- or near-future. According to this model, behavior is explained by the construction of different representations, or construals, of the same information depending on whether the information pertains to the distant- or near-future. There are two types of construals – high-level and low-level. High-level construals represent information about the distant-future and low-level construals represent information about the near-future. High-level features are goal-relevant. Low-level features are goal-irrelevant.

Research has shown that both changes in preference and in representation result from construals of information about the distant- versus near-future. Trope and Liberman (2000) have shown the preference for pursuing a goal is greater when the goal is at a greater temporal distance and less when the goal is brought to a close temporal distance. This preference change may be due to the finding that desirability considerations are more likely to guide distant-future preferences and feasibility considerations are more likely to guide near-future preferences (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Building on action identification theory (Vallacher & Wegner,

1989), Liberman & Trope (1998) have found that when people describe distant-future activities, they state the goals of the activities and when they describe near-future activities, they stated the means for achieving the goals.

This theoretical framework has been applied to an individual's level of power and mental abstraction (Smith & Trope, in press), abstract and concrete thinking (Förster, Friedman, & Liberman, 2004), and gambling preferences (Sagristano, Trope, & Liberman, 2002), but has not yet been examined in the interpersonal relationships realm.

The Present Research

We believe that most relationship milestones and many day-to-day happenings in relationships as well are the result of a decision made after presumably weighing alternatives in an approach-avoidance situation. We think that decisions about pursuing relationship goals are made differently when construed at high- and low-levels of representation.

In the present studies, two important relationship goals are examined. First, bringing up a relationship conflict to discuss with one's partner and second, meeting an attractive potential mate for the first time. We chose these two relationship goals in particular for two reasons. First, the valence of the emotions they incite is different for each. Talking about a conflict is generally considered a negative relationship experience. Meeting an attractive potential mate for the first time is generally considered a positive experience because of the possibility to increase intimacy (self-disclosure, bonding, learn about each other, etc). The second reason we chose these relationship goals to examine for the effects of temporal distance is that one is prevalent for individuals in committed romantic relationships and the other applies to individuals not involved in relationships.

Psychological approach-avoidance theory (Lewin, 1936; Miller, 1959) posits that psychological distance can strengthen or weaken these motivational forces to pursue goals. Similarly, temporal construal principles suggest that individuals should prefer to pursue their goals when they are framed in the distant-future more than when they are framed in the near-future. Furthermore, cognitive research shows that the preference for pursuing distal goals may be due to our optimism and confidence concerning distant-future outcomes relative to near-future ones. Gilovich, Kerr, and Medvec (1993) report on a series of findings about getting “cold feet,” that is, they show that individuals have higher performance expectancies for distant- compared with near-future tasks. It was predicted that analogous processes occur in the pursuit of relationship goals. As temporal distance decreases, the preference to pursue relationship goals should decrease. Also as temporal distance decreases, the likelihood of an individual to take steps toward goal achievement will decrease, along with the perceived desirability and feasibility of pursuing the goal. Finally, we expect distal relationship goal pursuit to be represented as high-level construals and proximal goal pursuit to be represented as low-level construals.

We tested these predictions in four studies. First, participants rated at likelihood of hypothetically approaching these two goals in the distant- versus near-future using a paper-and-pencil questionnaire (Study 1). Then we examined change in preference to pursue self-relevant relationship goals in the distant- versus near-future in the laboratory (Study 2). Next, desirability and feasibility considerations were measured and examined for the role they play in the likelihood of relationship goal pursuit in the distant- versus near-future (Study 3). Finally, differential cognitive representations of distant-future and near-future relationship goals were inspected (Study 4).

STUDY 1

Approach-avoidance tendencies in hypothetical relationship goal pursuit were examined using a paper-and-pencil method. Participants completed a 5-item questionnaire with instructions to rate how likely they were to engage in the activities described. Three questions addressed bringing up uncomfortable topics for discussion with their partners and the other two addressed how likely they were to approach an attractive potential mate in either the distant or near future. Participants were assigned to both the distant- and near-future conditions with each item alternating by condition.

Method

Participants

Participants were 70 undergraduate psychology students (54 females and 16 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 23 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = 1.11$). Forty reported being in a romantic relationship and 30 reported not being in a relationship.

Procedure

Participants completed a 5-item questionnaire specifically designed for this study and demographic information in a classroom setting with approximately 10-25 other participants present.

Materials

A five-item questionnaire was designed to compare how likely participants were to pursue hypothetical relationship goals at a distant- and near-future time. The first 3 questions

were about discussing uncomfortable topics with one's partner. They were as follows: "How likely are you to bring up a reoccurring relationship conflict with your partner in a few weeks (tonight)?" "How likely are you to discuss a personal problem with your partner in a few weeks (tonight)?" "How likely are you to ask your partner about a touchy topic from his/her past in a few weeks (tonight)?" The last 2 questions were about approaching an attractive potential mate. They were: "Next fall at a party, you will see someone who you've been attracted to for a while. (When you leave this room, you will see someone who you've been attracted to for a while coming down the hallway of the psychology building.) How likely is it that you will finally ask him/her out?" "Next semester (This afternoon), in class, you see someone attractive. How likely are you to initiate a conversation with him/her after class?" Questions were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all likely) to 7 (Extremely likely). For the first 3 questions, participants who were not in relationships were instructed to imagine they were romantically involved and answer accordingly. For the last 2 questions, participants who were in relationships were instructed to imagine they were not and answer accordingly.

Each question alternated by condition, therefore, each participant was assigned to both conditions. There were two versions of the questionnaire. In version A, questions 1, 3, and 5 were near-future condition questions and questions 2 and 4 were distant-future condition questions. In version B, questions 1, 3, and 5 were distant-future questions and questions 2 and 4 were near-future condition questions.

Results

Independent samples t-tests were performed comparing participants' ratings of likelihood of discussing uncomfortable topics and approaching a potential mate in the distant-future condition to those in the near-future condition. Participants in the distant-future condition ($M =$

3.83, $SD = 1.84$) reported being more likely to “bring up a reoccurring relationship conflict” with their partner than those in the near-future condition ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.39$), $t(68) = -2.723$, $p = .008$. They reported being more likely to “discuss a personal problem” with their partner in the distant-future condition ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.26$) than in the near-future condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(68) = 2.928$, $p = .005$, and more likely to “ask about a touchy topic from his/her past” in the distant-future condition ($M = 4.50$, $SD = 1.68$) than the near-future condition ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.79$), $t(68) = -4.113$, $p < .001$.

A similar pattern resulted for the two questions about approaching an attractive potential mate. Participants reported being more likely to “ask out” someone they’re attracted to in the distant-future condition ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.34$) than the near-future condition ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.32$), $t(68) = 2.304$, $p = .024$. They also reported being marginally more likely to initiate a conversation with an attractive classmate in the distant-future ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.66$) than in the near-future ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.73$), $t(68) = -1.681$, $p = .097$.

Brief Discussion

These data offer initial experimental evidence that construing the pursuit of a relationship goal in the distant-future, rather than the near-future, increases the likelihood that an individual’s will take action towards achieving that goal.

STUDY 2

The goal of study 2 was to determine if analogous approach-avoidance processes would occur in the distant- and near-future respectively when a self-relevant, rather than hypothetical, relationship goal is being pursued. To do this in the laboratory, participants in relationship were temporarily led to believe that they would call their partner on the phone to discuss an interpersonal conflict. Participants not in relationships were temporarily led to believe that they would meet another student, who was simultaneously participating in another psychology study, and met a description of their ideal mate. Within-subjects measurements of preference for pursuing the relationship goals of 1) bringing up a conflict for discussion with one's partner and 2) meeting an ideal mate were obtained.

Study 2a

In Study 2a, participants in relationships described an unresolved conflict they felt they needed to discuss with their partner. We asked them how much they would like to bring up this conflict with their partner at some point in the future for a distant-future measurement of preference to achieve the relationship goal of discussing a conflict with one's partner. Then we asked them to phone their partner while in the lab to discuss the conflict in a few minutes. Participants rated their preference to achieve their goal of discussing the conflict in the near-future measurement. Perceived closeness between the participant and his or her partner was also measured to rule out its effects on preference to discuss a relationship conflict in the distant- and near-future.

Method

Participants

Participants were 26 undergraduate psychology students (19 females and 7 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 25 with a mean age of 20 ($SD = 1.75$). Participants were all involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation. The mean relationship length was 16.7 months ($SD = 15.31$).

Procedures

Participants came to a laboratory session individually. First, experimenters verbally confirmed that they were currently in relationships. Upon consenting to participate, they completed descriptive information about themselves and their relationships, including a measure of closeness with their partner (Aron, Aron & Smollen, 1992). They also had the instructions to, “Please write a few sentences describing a conflict that you believe you and your partner need to spend time discussing and working to resolve.”

After completing these written tasks, the experimenter collected them and briefly looked at the conflict description. Then, she asked, “On a scale of 0 to 7, 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much,’ how much do you want to bring up the conflict you wrote about with your partner at some point in the future?” The participant responded orally and the experimenter recorder his or her rating.

Next, the experimenter said, “Now we’re going to go to a lab room down the hall with a phone. We’d like you to call your partner right now to discuss the conflict. On a scale of 0 to 7, again 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much,’ how much do you want to bring up this conflict with your partner right now?” If the participant voiced a concern about their partner’s availability (e.g. “He’s in class right now!”), the experimenter said, “If he/she is unavailable,

we'd like you to leave a message explaining that you feel that you should talk about the conflict.”

When the participant responded with his/her near-future preference rating, the experimenter recorded the response and said, “Okay, the experiment is over. You do not actually have to call him/her.” Participants were then fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near- Future Preference. Two questions assessed participants' preference to discuss a conflict with their partners in the distant-future and in the near-future. These questions included: (1) “How much do you want to bring up the conflict you wrote about with your partner at some point in the future?” and (2) “How much do you want to bring up this conflict with your partner right now?” Preferences were rated orally on an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much).

Closeness. To measure the participants' perceived closeness to their partners, Aron, Aron, and Smollen's (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self measure was used. The measure consists of 7 pairs of overlapping circles. The circles are drawn to show varying levels of overlap. The less two circles overlap, the less inclusion or closeness. The more two circles overlap, the more perceived closeness.

Results

A paired sample t-test showed a significant difference between distant-future preference ($M = 4.8$, $SD = 1.78$) and near-future preference ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 2.29$) to pursue the goal of discussing a conflict with one's partner, $t(24) = 4.315$, $p < .001$.

To assess whether the participants' perceived closeness to their partner moderated this finding, the difference between distant-future and near-future preference rating was regressed on

reported closeness. Closeness did not account for a significant change in rating from distant- to near-future ($B = .589, p = .23$).

Study 2b

In Study 2b, participants who were not in relationships described their ideal mate. They were asked how much they would like to meet a person similar to the ideal mate they described at some point in the future for a distant-future measurement of preference to achieve the relationship goal. During the study, the experimenter led participants to believe that she was conducting another session in a lab room down the hall. While they were working on a distracter task, she confidentially told participants that the “other participant” down the hall was actually a friend of hers and that she thought this friend matched the description of the ideal mate that they wrote earlier in the study. The experimenter suggested that the participant meet the “other” participant. Participants then rated how much they would like to meet this individual at a near-future time – when the experiment was over in a few minutes.

Method

Participants

Participants were 14 undergraduate psychology students (12 females and 2 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 20 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = .85$). Participants were not involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation.

Procedures

Participants came to a laboratory session individually. First, experimenters verbally confirmed that they were not currently in relationships. Upon consenting to participate, the experimenter led each participant to believe she was leaving the room temporarily to “check on her other experiment session” and instructed them to fill out some descriptive information about

themselves. Attached to the demographics page, another page of instructions asked participants to, “Please write a few sentences describing your ideal mate. Be as specific as you can be.”

The experimenter returned to the lab room after 3-5 minutes. When the participant had completing the written tasks, the experimenter collected the papers and briefly looked over the ideal mate description. Then, she asked, “On a scale of 0 to 7, 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much,’ how much do you want to meet a person like this at some point in the future?” The participant responded orally and the experimenter recorder his or her rating.

Next, the experimenter asked the participant to work on a distractor task while she checked on the “other” participant again. She returned after about 2 minutes and said, “I wouldn’t usually say this, but the person in my other experiment happens to be a friend of mine. He/She seems like someone you might like from the description you wrote. On a scale of 0 to 7, again 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much,’ how much do you want to meet him/her when the experiment is over?” When the participant responded with his/her near-future preference rating, the experimented recorded the response and said, “Okay, the experiment is over. There isn’t actually another participant down the hall.” Participants were then fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near- Future Preference. Two questions assessed participants’ preference to meet someone who matched the description of their ideal mate in the distant-future and in the near-future. These questions included: (1) “How much do you want to meet someone like this [the ideal mate you wrote about] at some point in the future?” and (2) “How much do you want to meet him/her [an invented student in another experiment down the hall who matches the

participant's description of his/her ideal mate] when the experiment is over?" Preferences were rated orally on an 8-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much).

Results

A paired sample t-test showed a significant difference between distant-future preference ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.03$) and near-future preference ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.55$) to pursue the goal of meeting their ideal mate, $t(13) = 4.289$, $p = .001$.

Brief Discussion

Participants preferred to pursue self-relevant relationship goal in the distant-future than when presented with the opportunity to pursue the same goal in the near-future.

STUDY 3

Using the same procedures as in Studies 2a and 2b we added 2 questions concerning desirability and feasibility of achieving the relationship goal in the distant- and near-future (Trope & Liberman, 1998). Feasibility and desirability are integral variables in construal level theory because they hone in on the main characteristics of high-level and low-level thoughts. Desirability reflects the superordinate, why aspects of an action, whereas feasibility reflects the subordinate, how aspects of an action (Carver & Scheier, 1981, 1990; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987).

This study also departed from study 2 in that it addressed the likelihood of actually pursuing a relationship goal in the distant- and near-future rather than measuring the preference for pursuing it. In Study 3a and 3b, it was predicted that desirability, feasibility, and likelihood would all decrease as temporal distance decreases. We also assessed the predictability of the likelihood to take action towards achieving a relationship goal in the distant- and near-future from measures of desirability and feasibility in both the distant- and near-future. It was hypothesized that the change in desirability and change in feasibility from distant- to near-future judgments would account for variance in the change in likelihood of pursuing the goal in the distant- versus near-future.

Study 3a

Method

Participants

Participants were 71 undergraduate psychology students (43 females and 28 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 24 with a mean age of 20 ($SD = 1.21$). Participants were all involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation. The mean relationship length was 15.2 months ($SD = 16.11$).

Procedure

The same procedure used in Study 2a was used in Study 3a with one exception. The questions the participants answered pre- and post-manipulation were different in content and quantity. Participants answered 3 questions about pursuing the goal to discuss a conflict with their partners in the distant-future and 3 questions about pursuing the same goal in the near-future.

More specifically, after participants described a relationship conflict they felt they should discuss with their partners, they were asked, “How much do you want to talk about this conflict with your partner at some point?” to measure desirability. Then they were asked, “How probable is it that this conversation would be successful?” to measure feasibility. The third question about pursuing the goal at a distant-future time addressed the likelihood that participants would take action toward achieving that goal. Participants answered, “How likely are you to bring up the conflict with your partner at some point?” After the 3 distant-future questions were asked, the experimenter stated the near-future manipulation. As in Study 2a, the opportunity to discuss the conflict was presented by telling participants that we’d like them to call their partner on a phone in another lab room. Then participants answered similar questions about desirability to discuss

the conflict with their partner in the near-future, the feasibility of a successful outcome of a near-future conversation, and their willingness to call their partner to discuss the conflict in the near-future. Participants answered each question orally and the experimenter recorded responses.

They were told they did not actually have to phone their partner and were fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near-Future Desirability. Two questions measured the participants' desire to discuss a relationship conflict with their partners in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: "How much do you want to talk about this conflict with your partner at some point?" and "How much do you want to talk about this conflict with him/her right now?" Participants rated desirability on a scale of 0 to 7 described orally by the experimenter as, "0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very Much.'"

Distant- and Near-Future Feasibility. Two questions measured the participants' perceived feasibility of discussing a relationship conflict with their partners in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: "How probable is it that this conversation would be successful?" and "How probably is it that this conversation will be successful?" Participants rated perceived feasibility on a scale of 0% to 100% described orally by the experimenter as, "0% means 'Not at all probable,' 100% means 'Completely probable,' and 50% means 'It could go either way.'"

Distant- and Near-Future Likelihood. Two questions measured the participants' likelihood of actually discussing a relationship conflict with their partners in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: "How likely are you to bring up the conflict with your partner at some point?" and "How willing are you to bring up the conflict with your partner right now?" Participants rated desirability on a scale of 0 to 7 described orally by the experimenter as, "0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very Much.'"

Results

First, paired sample t-tests were performed to assess the difference between desirability, perceived feasibility, and likelihood of pursuing the goal to discuss a relationship conflict with one's partner in the distant- versus near-future. Results were similar to those in Study 2a for the desirability participants reported such that discussing a conflict with their partners was more desirable in the distant-future ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.37$) than in the near-future ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 2.22$), $t(67) = 9.64$, $p < .001$. The same pattern emerged for perceived feasibility of bringing up the conflict. Participants reported that success in resolving the conflict was more probable in the distant- ($M = 71.84$, $SD = 25.19$) than near-future ($M = 45.93$, $SD = 35.21$), $t(67) = 7.76$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, participants reported that the likelihood that they would actually initiate conversation about the conflict was significantly greater in the distant-future ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 1.46$) than near-future ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 2.51$), $t(67) = 10.08$, $p < .001$.

Additional analyses addressed the second hypothesis of this study that change in likelihood of pursuing the goal between the distant- versus near-future can be predicted by the change in desirability and change in feasibility from distant- to near-future. First, three difference scores were calculated for each participant. One corresponded to the difference between distant-future and near-future ratings of desirability, a second to the difference between distant- and near-future ratings of feasibility, and a third to the difference between ratings of likelihood of actually pursuing their goal in the distant- or near future.

The likelihood difference scores were regressed simultaneously on the desirability and feasibility difference scores. Due to the within-subjects nature of the data, we could not test for true statistical mediation of likelihood ratings by desirability and feasibility (Baron & Kenny, 1986). However, this analysis yielded significant coefficients for both change in desirability ($\beta =$

.286, $p = .021$) and change in feasibility ($\beta = .339$, $p = .007$), indicating that both how much one wants to discuss a conflict with their partner in the distant- versus near-future and how feasible they perceive success to be at different points in the future contributes to the likelihood of taking action to achieve the relationship goal. The overall model accounted for 29.6% of the variance in change in likelihood from distant- to near-future.

Study 3b

Method

Participants

Participants were 38 undergraduate psychology students (25 females and 13 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 22 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = 1.1$). Participants were not involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation.

Procedure

The same procedure used in Study 2b was used in Study 3b with one exception. As in Study 3a, participants answered 3 questions about pursuing the goal to meet a potential mate in the distant-future and 3 questions about pursuing the same goal in the near-future.

More specifically, after participants described their ideal mate, they were asked, “How much do you want to meet someone like the ideal mate you described at some point?” to measure desirability. Then they were asked, “How probable is it that meeting a person like this would be successful?” to measure feasibility. The third question about pursuing the goal at a distant-future time addressed the likelihood that participants would take action toward achieving that goal. Participants answered, “How likely are you to go ahead with meeting someone like you’ve described if the opportunity comes along at some point?”

After the three distant-future questions were asked, the experimenter stated the near-future manipulation. As in Study 2a, the experimenter led participants to believe they had the opportunity to meet someone like the ideal mate they described in the near-future. The experimenter told each participant that a student participating in a simultaneous experiment session she was running down the hall was a friend of hers that matched the description they wrote of their ideal mate. Then participants answered similar questions about desirability to meet someone who matched a description of their ideal mate in the near-future, the feasibility of a successful near-future meeting, and their willingness to actually meet this person in the near-future. Participants answered each question orally and the experimenter recorded responses. They were told there was no such ideal mate student to meet and were fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near-Future Desirability. Two questions measured the participants' desire to meet their ideal mate in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: "How much do you want to meet someone like the ideal mate you described at some point?" and "How much do you want to meet him/her [an invented participant in another experiment down the hall who matched their ideal mate description] right now?" Participants rated desirability on a scale of 0 to 7 described orally by the experimenter as, "0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very Much.'"

Distant- and Near-Future Feasibility. Two questions measured the participants' perceived feasibility of a successful first meeting with someone who matches a description of their ideal mate in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: "How probable is it that meeting a person like this would be successful?" and "How probably is it that this meeting will be successful?" Participants rated perceived feasibility on a scale of 0% to 100% described orally by

the experimenter as, “0% means ‘Not at all probable,’ 100% means ‘Completely probable,’ and 50% means ‘It could go either way.’”

Distant- and Near-Future Likelihood. Two questions measured the participants’ likelihood of actually meeting some one like their ideal mate in the distant- and near-future. The questions were: “How likely are you to go ahead with meeting someone like you’ve described if the opportunity comes along at some point?” and “How willing are you to meet him/her [an invented participant in another experiment down the hall who matched their ideal mate description] in a few minutes?” Participants rated desirability on a scale of 0 to 7 described orally by the experimenter as, “0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very Much.’”

Results

First, paired sample t-tests were performed to assess the difference between desirability, perceived feasibility, and likelihood of pursuing the goal to meet an ideal mate in the distant- versus near-future. Results were similar to those in Study 2b for the desirability participants reported such that meeting an ideal mate was more desirable in the distant-future ($M = 6.58$, $SD = .72$) than in the near-future ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(37) = 5.26$, $p < .001$. The same pattern emerged for perceived feasibility such that participants reported that a successful meeting was more probable in the distant- ($M = 74.21$, $SD = 20.22$) than near-future ($M = 64.08$, $SD = 20.43$), $t(37) = 2.66$, $p = .01$. Furthermore, participants reported that the likelihood that they would go through with meeting someone who matched a description of their ideal mate was significantly greater in the distant-future ($M = 6.21$, $SD = .96$) than near-future ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(37) = 3.44$, $p = .001$.

Additional analyses addressed the second hypothesis of this study that change in likelihood of pursuing a relationship goal between the distant- versus near-future can be

predicted by the change in desirability and change in feasibility from distant- to near-future. As in Study 3a, three difference scores were calculated for each participant by subtracting their ratings of desirability, feasibility, and likelihood of pursuing the relationship goal in the distant- from their near-future ratings of the same three constructs.

The likelihood difference scores were regressed simultaneously on the desirability and feasibility difference scores. This analysis yielded only one significant coefficient for change in desirability ($\beta = .608, p < .001$). The slope for change in feasibility was not significant ($\beta = .112, ns$). A high correlation of $r = .53$ between the two predictors indicates that this nonsignificant coefficient is due to multicollinearity. When each predictor is entered into a separate model, both the coefficients of change in desirability ($\beta = .668, p < .001$) and change in feasibility ($\beta = .435, p = .006$) are significant, indicating that both how much one wants to meet an individual who matches a description of their ideal mate in the distant- versus near-future and how feasible they perceive a successful meeting to be at different points in the future contributes to the likelihood of taking action to achieve the relationship goal of meeting a potential mate.

Brief Discussion

This study shows that perceived desirability of achieving a relationship goal decreases as the goal becomes more proximal in time. The same relationship exists between temporal distance and feasibility considerations. This study is important in addressing the main questions behind this research because it shows that perceived desirability and feasibility are two underlying variables at work in the approach-avoidance processes associated with distant- and near-future relationship goal pursuit.

STUDY 4

In Study 4, we examined mental representation of relationship goal pursuit in the distant- and near future. Participants were randomly assigned to either the distant- or near-future condition, which indicated at what point in the procedure they would complete a thought listing task. The thought listing tasks were coded for number of high-level thoughts and number of low-level thoughts present. It was predicted that the high-level construals would dominate distant-future participants' thought listings and low-level construals would be more prevalent in near-future participants' thought listings. It was also hypothesized that high-level thought would play a mediational role in change in preference to pursue a relationship goal in the distant- versus near-future.

Study 4a

Method

Participants

Participants were 62 undergraduate psychology students (55 females and 7 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 25 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = 1.4$). Participants were all involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation. The mean relationship length was 19 months ($SD = 17.22$). Participants were randomly assigned to either the distant-future or near-future condition.

Procedure

The same procedure used in Study 4a was used in Study 2a with one exception. Participants were assigned to either the distant-future or near-future condition. In the distant-

future condition, participants completed a thought listing task after they rated how much they would like to bring up the conflict with their partner “at some point” in the future. The instructions for the thought listing task were as follows: “Now, imagine yourself discussing the conflict with your partner at some point in the future. Please describe it here:” in the distant-future condition. When participants were finished with this task, the experimenter proceeded with the near-future manipulation, telling the participant that there was a telephone in the lab room next door and that we’d like them to call their partner on it to talk about the conflict. Participants were asked to rate how much they wanted to bring up the conflict with their partners in the near-future and then were told they did not actually have to call and were fully debriefed.

In the near-future condition, participants rated their preference for discussing the conflict with their partner in the distant-future. Immediately following, the experimenter proceeded with the near-future manipulation and participants rated how much they wanted to discuss the conflict with their partner in a few minutes. Then participants completed the thought listing task. The instructions for the near-future thought listing task were as follows: “Now, imagine yourself discussing the conflict with your partner when you call him/her in a few minutes. Please describe it here.” When they completed the thought listing task, the experimenter told them that they did not actually have to call their partner and were fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near-Future Ratings. Two questions that were the same as in Study 2a assessed participants’ preference to discuss a conflict with their partners in the distant-future and in the near-future.

High-Level and Low-Level Thoughts. The thought listing tasks that participants completed about discussing a conflict with their partner at either a distant-future time or in a near-future time were

coded by two coders who were blind to condition. Coders were asked to divide each participant's writing into distinct thoughts (i.e. either by each sentence or bullet point or divide up long sentences into the appropriate number of thoughts). Then they were asked to code each thought as either high or low-level. Qualities of both of these categories were taught to the coders using the explanation of high- versus low-level mental representations provided by Trope and Liberman's (2003).

The interrater reliability was assessed with three Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficients. Internal consistency among the two raters concerning the number of high-level thoughts was $\alpha = .60$; the number of low-level thoughts was $\alpha = .78$; and the total number of thoughts in each thought listing task was $\alpha = .96$. Given the high levels of agreement, we took means of the two coders judgments, which resulted in three composites for number of high-level thoughts, number of low-level thoughts, and total number of thoughts, respectively. These composites were used in the main analyses.

Results

To ensure that the change in preference to pursue a relationship goal in the distant- versus near-future replicated from Study 2a, a paired sample t-test was performed. It showed a significant difference between distant-future preference ratings ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.51$) and near-future preference ratings ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 2.09$) to pursue the goal of discussing a conflict with one's partner, $t(61) = 13.74$, $p < .001$.

To assess whether the number of high-level thoughts varied by condition (distant- or near- future), first the number of high-level thoughts were divided by the number of total thoughts to find the percentages of high-level thought for each thought listing. A percentage was also calculated for low-level thoughts. Then three independent samples t-test were performed to

compare the percentage of high-level thoughts, percentage of low-level thoughts, and total number of thoughts in the distant- versus near-future conditions. As predicted, the percentage of high-level thoughts in the distant-future condition was greater ($M = .39, SD = .20$) than in the near-future condition ($M = .28, SD = .16$), $t(60) = 2.72, p = .027$. Since all of the thoughts were categorized by coders as either high- or low-level, the number of low-level thoughts also differed significantly by condition, such that the percentage of low-level thoughts was greater in the near-future condition ($M = .72, SD = .16$), than in the distant-future condition ($M = .61, SD = .20$), $t(60) = -2.27, p = .027$. The total number of thoughts did not differ significantly by condition, $t(60) = 1.62, p > .1$.

To assess if the percentage of high-level thoughts played a mediational role in the change in preference to pursue the relationship goal in the distant- and near-future, near-future ratings were regressed simultaneously on distant-future ratings and percentage of high-level thoughts. This analyses resulted in a significant coefficient for distant-future ratings, $B = .709, p < .001$, indicating that in general, higher distant-future ratings predicted higher near-future ratings. The coefficient for percentage of high-level thoughts did not reach significance, $B = 1.92, p = .12$.

However, one participants' data was treated as an outlier and dropped from this analysis, as recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003), due to a high centered leverage value. The same regression analyses then resulted in two significant coefficients for both distant-future ratings and percentage of high-level thoughts, $B = .70, p < .001$ and $B = 2.58, p = .04$, respectively. Approximately 32% of the variance in near-future ratings was accounted for by this model.

In deleting the one outlying case, the difference in percentage of high-level thoughts remained significantly greater in the distant-future condition ($M = .37, SD = .19$) than in the near-future condition ($M = .28, SD = .16$), $t(1,59) = 2.06, p = .04$.

Study 4b

Method

Participants

Participants were 61 undergraduate psychology students (32 females and 29 males), participating for partial course credit. They ranged in age from 18 to 22 with a mean age of 19 ($SD = 1.03$). Participants were not involved in romantic relationships at the time of participation. Participants were randomly assigned to the distant-future or near-future condition.

Procedure

In this study, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to validate online dating measures. Participants came to the laboratory session individually and were randomly assigned to either the distant-future or near-future condition, which indicated the point in the procedure that they would complete the thought listing task.

First, participants completed four questionnaires about their personality and their ideal partner's personality and habits. The data from these questionnaires was not analyzed for this study. The experimenter collected the questionnaires and said, "Before we go on with the experiment, I have to go down the hall to a computer to scan and score these measures. If we find a match with someone else in our database, on a scale of 0 to 7 (0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very much'), how much would you like to meet this person as some point?" The experimenter recorded the number that the participant responded. While the experimenter was

supposedly scoring the questionnaires (which she did not actually do), participants completed a page of demographics information.

The experimenter returned to the lab room, she said told all participants, “We found a match for you in our database.” Next, participants in distant-future condition were asked to complete a thought listing task with the following instructions: “If your responses matched with someone else’s, imagining yourself meeting him/her later in the semester. Please describe it here:” The experimenter left the room to “note something in the computer.” When the experimenter returned and participants had completed their thought listing task, she led them to believe that the individual they “matched” with was presently participating in another experiment down the hall. The experimenter asked participants in this group, “On a scale of 0 to 7 (again, 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much’), how much would you like to meet this person when the experiment is over in a few minutes?” After the experimenter recorded the number the participant responded with, the participants were told there was actually no database or individual that matched with them down the hall and were fully debriefed.

Participants in the near-future condition were led to believe that the person they “matched” with was presently participating in another experiment down the hall before they completed the thought listing task. The experimenter asked participants in this group, “On a scale of 0 to 7 (again, 0 meaning ‘Not at all’ and 7 meaning ‘Very much’), how much would you like to meet this person when the experiment is over in a few minutes?” After the experimenter recorded the number the participant responded with, she asked them to complete the same thought listing task as the participants in the distant-future condition, but crossed out “later in the semester” with her pen and hand-wrote in “in a few minutes” on the instructions. When the

thought listing task was complete, the experimenter told participants that there was actually no individual that matched with them down the hall and were fully debriefed.

Materials

Distant- and Near-Future Ratings. Two questions assessed participants' preference to meet a potential mate in the distant-future and in the near-future. These questions were: "If we find a match with someone else in our database, on a scale of 0 to 7 (0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very much'), how much would you like to meet this person as some point?" and "On a scale of 0 to 7 (again, 0 meaning 'Not at all' and 7 meaning 'Very much'), how much would you like to meet this person [who your questionnaire answers matched with and happens to be presently participating in another experiment down the hall] when the experiment is over in a few minutes?"

High-Level and Low-Level Thoughts. The thought listing tasks that participants completed about meeting the individual whose answers "matched" with theirs at either a distant-future time or in a near-future time were coded by two coders who were blind to condition. Coders were asked to divide each participant's writing into distinct thoughts (i.e. either by each sentence or bullet point or divide up long sentences into the appropriate number of thoughts). Then they were asked to code each thought as either high or low-level. Qualities of both of these categories were taught to the coders using the explanation of high- versus low-level mental representations provided by Trope and Liberman's (2003).

The interrater reliability was assessed with three Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient. Internal consistency among the two raters concerning the number of high-level thoughts was $\alpha = .88$; the number of low-level thoughts was $\alpha = .70$; and the total number of thoughts in each thought listing task was $\alpha = .90$. Given the high levels of agreement, we took means of the two

coders judgments, which resulted in three composites for number of high-level thoughts, number of low-level thoughts, and total number of thoughts, respectively. These composites were used in the main analyses.

Results

To ensure that the change in preference to pursue a relationship goal in the distant- versus near-future replicated from Study 2b, a paired sample t-test was performed. It showed a significant difference between distant-future preference ratings ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.77$) and near-future preference ratings ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.81$) to pursue the goal of discussing a conflict with one's partner, $t(60) = 4.07, p < .001$.

To assess whether the number of high-level thoughts varied by condition (distant- or near- future), first the number of high-level thoughts were divided by the number of total thoughts to find the percentages of high-level thought for each thought listing. A percentage was also calculated for low-level thoughts. Then three independent samples t-test were performed to compare the percentage of high-level thoughts, percentage of low-level thoughts, and total number of thoughts in the distant- versus near-future conditions. As predicted, the percentage of high-level thoughts in the distant-future condition was greater ($M = .24, SD = .24$) than in the near-future condition ($M = .29, SD = .29$), $t(59) = 2.81, p = .007$. Since all of the thoughts were categorized by coders as either high- or low-level, the number of low-level thoughts also differed significantly by condition, such that the percentage of low-level thoughts was greater in the near-future condition ($M = .44, SD = .23$), than in the distant-future condition ($M = .65, SD = .29$), $t(59) = -3.08, p = .003$. The total number of thoughts also differed by condition with a mean of 5.40 ($SD = 2.28$) thoughts in the distant-future and a mean of 3.55 ($SD = 1.72$) thoughts in the near-future, $t(59) = 3.11, p = .003$.

To assess if the percentage of high-level thoughts played a mediational role in the change in preference to pursue the relationship goal in the distant- and near-future, near-future ratings were regressed simultaneously on distant-future ratings and percentage of high-level thoughts. This analyses resulted in a significant coefficient for distant-future ratings, $B = .752$, $p < .001$, indicating that in general, higher distant-future ratings predicted higher near-future ratings. The coefficient for percentage of high-level thoughts, however, was not significant, $B = -.07$, *ns*.

Brief Discussion

This study confirmed that in a distant-future orientation, individuals represent relationship goal pursuit with more high-level thoughts than in a near-future orientation. Study 4a also provided preliminary evidence supporting a mediational role of high-level construals in the change in preference to pursue a relationship goal in the distant- versus near-future. That is to say, the more goal-relevant thoughts were considered, the less likely the preference to pursue a relationship goal decreased when the opportunity was presented in the near-future.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The evidence gathered in these four studies suggests that when confronted with the pursuit of a relationship goal in the distant-future, individuals tend to approach it. But when goal pursuit is a possibility in the near-future, individuals tend to avoid it. Studies 1 and 2 provide evidence that individuals prefer relationship to pursue relationship goals when they are framed in the distant-future to when they are features of the near-future. It was predicted that this shift in preference was due to the principles of construal level theory. That is to say, relationship goals are mentally represented by high-level, abstract, goal-relevant construals in the distant-future, whereas they are represented by low-level, detailed, goal-irrelevant construals in the near-future (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Study 3 provided preliminary evidence of construal level shifting from high-level to low-level when the opportunity to pursue a relationship goal was presented in the distant-future and again in the near-future. Decrease in participants' ratings of their desire to achieve a relationship goal in the distant and near-future was considered indicative of less high-level construals because they focus attention on central features of the goal as temporal distance decreases (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Similarly, decrease in participants' ratings of perceived feasibility of pursuing a goal successfully in the distant and near-future were considered indicative of more low-level construals because they direct awareness to peripheral aspects of goal achievement.

Finally, in study 4 we found high-level thoughts to be dominant in the participants' written descriptions of both discussing a conflict with their partner and meeting an attractive potential mate at a distant-future time. Conversely, low-level thoughts were central to

participants' description of these same goal pursuits in the near-future. Initial evidence of the prevalence of high-level thoughts mediating preference to pursue a relationship goal was suggested in study 4a though additional investigation of this process is necessary to make more solid conclusions.

The implications for these findings in individuals' interpersonal lives are profound. In the present research, the specific goals of resolving a relationship with one's partner and meeting an attractive potential mate are examined. We believe that approach avoidance processes and change in construal generalizes to other relationship goals with a positive valence, such as proposing marriage and saying "I love you" for the first time, as well as those with negative valence, such as breaking off a failing relationship. The results of a shift from approach to avoidance motivation at distant and near-future times can be harmless in the pursuit of some relationship goals. Avoiding an argument with one's partner about who is going to take out the trash in the near-future will probably have little consequence for the individuals in the dyad or the relationship's stability itself. However, when low-level construals and avoidance tendencies take hold of an individual with the goal of leaving an abusive partner, the effects can be profound and quite dangerous.

Previous research converges with the present studies concerning the psychological implications of approach and avoidance processes in the interpersonal realm. Pursuit of avoidance goals, in general, has been related to lower subjective well-being (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997). More specific to relationship goals, Gable (2000) has shown that more satisfied spouses were less likely to adopt avoidance goals for their marriages. Furthermore, avoidance motives and avoidance goals consistently predicted increased anxiety and negative attitudes towards social bonds over time (Gable, 2006). Taken together, this array of studies implies that

avoidance motivation is detrimental to psychological well-being, positive relational outcomes, and attitudes towards relationships. Our studies extend this line of research by showing a possible underlying mechanism for the avoidance motivation – low-level construals.

The findings of our studies, however, diverge with others in the field. Approaching intimacy has been associated with positive affect (Laurenceau, Troy, & Carver, 2005; Berscheid, 1983, 1991). The present research, conversely, demonstrates that this is not always the case. In the near-future, participants tended to avoid the opportunity to meet an attractive potential mate for the first time, which would potentially lead to some initial level of intimacy. Further research into reconciling this data with past research is necessary.

Future directions

In order to further explore the possibility of high-level thoughts playing a mediational role in relationship goal pursuit (initial evidence in Study 4), an important next step is to attempt to buffer the effects of near-future, low-level construals, by deliberately focusing attention on goal-relevant, high-level construals. The finding that more high-level thoughts lead to less of a decrease in preference to discuss a conflict with one's partner in the near-future in Study 4a suggests that we might be able to “jump start” goal pursuit. A next step is to attempt to direct individuals' cognitions towards high-level thinking when the opportunity for goal pursuit is in the near-future.

Individual differences in approach and avoidance orientation should also be examined in the relationship context. Individuals with a greater sensitivity toward the behavioral approach system (BAS) or toward the behavioral inhibition system (BIS) (Carver & White, 1994) might differ systematically on the way they consider goal pursuit, in general, in the distant- versus near-future. That is to say, those who tend to pursue goals that involve moving toward something

desired or involve moving away from something unpleasant may react differentially to goal pursuit when it becomes a feature of the near-future.

Social motivation as an individual difference would also be useful to examine in relation to this line research. Some individuals are high in the need for affiliation and need for rejection (Mehrabian & Ksionzky, 1974). Approaching relationship goals in the distant and near future may be moderated by these social needs. For example, one might predict that those high in the need for affiliation may avoid pursuing relationship goals in the near-future as fiercely as those high in the need for rejection. This relates closely to individual differences in interpersonal rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996). For individuals high in rejection sensitivity, the effects of low-level thoughts in relationship goal pursuit might be particularly salient when the goal is in the near-future. For instance, a person with high rejection sensitivity may focus attention more on the details of how he or she looks, which words to say, the exact moment when to go up to an attractive person at a party. Whereas a person lower in rejection sensitivity, might be able to devote more attention to the primary aspects of their goal in approaching an attractive person at a party and, therefore, perhaps more likely to go through with introducing himself.

Achieving relationship goals is important for fulfilling psychological needs and, subsequently, for well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Because pursuing relationship goals is central to individuals' well-being, it is important to examine the motivation that propels relationship goal achievement. The research presented specifically examines approach/avoidance propensity toward relationships goals when the opportunity to pursue them is in the distant or near-future. These studies provide initial evidence that approach/avoidance tendencies occur because of the differential cognitive representations of these goals in the distant- and near-future.

REFERENCES

- Ainslie, G. (1975). Specious reward: A behavioral theory of impulsiveness and impulse control. *Psychological Bulletin*, 82(4), 463-496.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollen, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63, 596-612.
- Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator-mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 1173-1182.
- Baumeister, R. F. & Leary, M. R. (1998). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117, 497-529.
- Behrendt, G., & Ruotola-Behrendt, A. (2005). *It's called a break-up because it's broken*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Berscheid, E. (1983). Emotion. In Kelley, H. H., Berscheid, E., Christensen, A., Harvey, J. H., Huston, T. L., Levinger, G., McClintock, E., Peplau, L. A. & Peterson, D. R. (Eds.), *Close Relationships*: 110-168. New York: W. H. Freeman
- Berscheid, E. (1991). The emotion-in-relationships model: Reflections and update. In W. Kessen & A. Ortony (Eds.), *Memories, thoughts, and emotions: Essays in honor of George Mandler*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Attachment* (Vol. 1). New York: Basic.
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1981). *Attention and self-regulation: A control theory approach to human behavior*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1990). Principles of self-regulation. In E. T. Higgins & R. M. Sorrentino (Eds.). *Handbook of motivation and cognition: Foundations of social behavior* (Vol 2, p. 3-52). New York: Guilford Press.
- Carver, C. S., & White, T. L. (1994). Behavioral inhibition, behavioral activation, and affective responses to impending reward and punishment: The BIS/BAS Scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *67*, 319-333.
- Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences, 3rd Edition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. *Psychometrika*, *12*, 1-16.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Downey, G., & Feldman, S. I. (1996). Implications of rejection sensitivity for intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *70*, 1327-1343.
- Dutter, B. (1998). *The shy guy's guide to dating*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Elliot, A. J., Sheldon, K. M., & Church, M. A. (1997). Avoidance Personal Goals and Subjective Well-Being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *23*, 915-927.
- England, A. (2005, October 18). Self-help books take a grip on Kenya's middle class. *Financial Times*, p. 11.
- Förster, J., Friedman, R. S., & Liberman, N. (2004). Temporal construal effects on abstract and concrete thinking: Consequences for insight and creative cognition. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *87*, 177-189.

- Gable, S.L. (2000). *Appetitive and Aversive Social Motivation*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester.
- Gable, S. L. (2006). Approach and Avoidance Social Motives and Goals. *Journal of Personality*, *74*, 175-222.
- Gable, S. L.; Reis, H. T.; Impett, E. A. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *87*, 228-245.
- Gilovich, T., Kerr, M., and Medvec, V. H. (1993). Effects of temporal perspective on subjective confidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *64*, 552-560.
- Gollwitzer, P.M., Fujita, K., & Oettingen, G. (2004). Planning and the implementation of goals. In R.F. Baumeister & K.D. Vohs (Eds.) *Handbook of self-regulation: Research, theory and applications* (pp.211-228). New York: Guilford Press.
- Kiecolt-Glaser, J. K., & Newton, T. L. (2001). Marriage and health: His and hers. *Psychological Bulletin*, *127*, 472-503.
- Kitchen, P. (2006 March 2). By the millions, Americans turn to advice books to solve problems from loneliness to bankruptcy. *Newsday*, p. A43.
- Laurenceau, J., Troy, A. B., & Carver, C. S. (2005). Two distinct emotional experiences in romantic relationships: Effects of perceptions regarding approach of intimacy and avoidance of conflict. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *31*, 1123-1133.
- Lewin, K. (1935). *A dynamic theory of personality*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science*. New York: Harper.
- Liberman, N., & Trope, Y. (1998). The role of feasibility and desirability considerations in near and distant future decisions: A test of temporal construal theory. *Journal of Personality*

- and Social Psychology*, 75, 5-18.
- Maslow, A. H. (1968). *Toward a psychology of being*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- Mehrabian, A. & Ksionzky, S. (1974). *A theory of affiliation*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Mischel, W. (1974). Processes in delay of gratification. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology*. New York: Academic Press.
- Miller, N. E. (1959). Liberalization of basic S-R concepts: Extensions to conflict behavior, motivation and social learning. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science* (Vol. 2): *General systematic formulations, learning and special processes*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Nisan, M., & Minkowich, A. (1973). The effect of expected temporal distance on risk taking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 25, 375–380.
- Reis, H. T. (1990). The role of intimacy in interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 9, 15-30.
- Rook, K.S. (1987). Social support versus companionship: Effects on life stress, loneliness, and evaluations by others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 52, 1132-1147.
- Sagristano, M. D., Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2002). Time dependent gambling: Odds now, money later. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 131, 364-376.
- Smith, P. K., & Trope, Y. (in press). You focus on the forest when you're in charge of the trees: Priming power and abstract information processing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2000). Temporal construal and time-dependent changes in preference. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79, 876-889.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2003). Temporal construal. *Psychological Review*, 110, 403-421.

Vallacher, R. R., & Wegner, D. M. (1987). What do people think they're doing? Action identification and human behavior. *Psychological Review*, *94*, 3-15.

Vallacher, R. R., & Wegner, D. M. (1989). Levels of personal agency: Individual variation in action identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*, 660-671.