

12-2014

Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal and Relationship Quality: Same-Sex Friendships and Opposite-Sex Romantic Relationships

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RELATIONAL-INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL AND RELATIONSHIP
QUALITY: SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS AND OPPOSITE-SEX ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIPS

by

Tabitha Lynn Ingram

Submitted to the Honors Program Council

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2014

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2014

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RELATIONAL-INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUAL AND RELATIONSHIP
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RELATIONSHIPS

Tabitha Ingram

Southeastern University, 2014

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to elucidate the connection between relational-interdependent self-construal and relationship quality, with the cognitive mindset mediating the demonstration of autonomous efforts to maintain a relationship. For this study, I used a 22-question survey for relationship quality, measured separately for friendships and romantic relationships (using the Friendship Quality Scale and the Romance Quality Scale), and the 11-question Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale for the measurement of self-construal. The surveys were distributed by means of an online survey accessible to the student population at a religiously affiliated private university in the South-Atlantic region of the United States. For both friendships and romantic relationships, scores on the Relational-Interdependent Scale were correlated with relationship quality. The relationship quality means for friendships and romantic relationships were significantly different from each other, as measured by an independent measures t-test. My results showed that no significant correlations were found between the variables of relational-interdependent self-construal and relationship quality. Interestingly, no substantial gender differences were found between the means of either

type of relationship quality. Gender differences also were marginal between the means of relational-interdependent self-construal. Although the study did not procure statistical significance, it succeeded in presenting a theoretical comparison between friendships and romantic relationships, and illustrated the complexity of perception of relationship quality for emerging adults.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Undoubtedly, relationships are vital to well-being. Relationships are explicitly involved in health promoting behavior (Dennis, 2011), and they provide a necessary social component to one's life. Whenever a person has some form of a healthy relationship, whether romantic or not, that person has greater psychological health than those who do not have a high-quality relationship (Birditt, Antonucci, & Tighe, 2012). A high-quality relationship is one in which there is mutual self-disclosure, perceived mattering, and emotional bonding. Essentially, both friendships and romantic relationships can exist as high-quality relationships and provide the emotional security and intimacy needs that are central to human nature.

Emerging adulthood, a developmental stage between the years 18 and 25, involves the manifestation of the need to discover one's identity (Arnett, 2007) and to form intimate relationships (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). During this stage, both friendships and romantic relationships characterize an individual's social fabric. Although the natures of the two types of relationships may differ, the primary social and psychological benefits associated with romantic relationships can also be drawn from friendships (Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, Tyrell, 2011; Fehr, 2004). Both classifications of relationships involve mutual self-disclosure, which serves to build trust within the interactions.

Examination of self-reported levels of companionship, help, security and closeness can identify the quality of a relationship (Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, & Tani, 2010). The behaviors and thoughts of the individuals serve as the sites where this information is obtained. These first three elements of a relationship involve a person's perception of safety along with his or her level of motivation to promote the wellbeing of the other. The fourth element, closeness, refers to "the strength of the emotional connection and attachment...along with the sense of affection" (Ponti et al., 2010). Within closeness, mutual self-disclosure is a substantial element of relationship quality. Closeness, especially as it relates to emotional connection, involves trust and emotional intimacy and is inherent within mutual self-disclosure (Carter, & Carter, 2010). In summary, these elements compose the primary indications of the strength of the relationship.

From the perspective of the aspects of relationship quality, the process of identity formation can be better understood. People often construct personal identity through interactions with others (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009). The developmental period of emerging adulthood involves the dual importance of autonomy goals and societal expectations (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Research on identity formation often includes such interplay between self and other importance. The concept of self-construal has been used to classify depictions of one's identity, but the standard scales for its measurement have not accounted for variations in levels of both inter and intrapersonal influence. While these scales for self-construal have been successfully used to examine collectivistic cultures, such data cannot be implicitly applied to individualistic cultures.

In the United States, a prime example of an individualistic culture, identity formation differs from collectivistic cultures in that persons place a higher degree of importance on autonomy (Verplanken, Trafimow, Khusid, Holland, & Steentjes, 2009). Because specific levels of influence vary among individuals, the term “relational-interdependency” describes the extent to which persons draw their identity from relating with others (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). The Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale (Cross et al., 2000), a self-reported individualistic measure, provides for the inclusion of motivations from both self and others. According to this scale, classifications of relational-interdependent self-construal can be labeled ranging from low to high, with high referring to a person who greatly incorporates his or her relationships with others into the formation of his or her own personal identity. Therefore, the construct of relational interdependency is appropriate for study in individualistic cultures because it allows for the inclusion of autonomous motivations.

As stated earlier, a high quality relationship involves the presence of mutual self-disclosure, perceived mattering, and emotional bonding. Given that high quality relationships provide emotional fulfillment during emerging adulthood, I hope to elucidate the role of the cognitive mindset of relational self-construal within the process of identity formation. The measurement of relational-interdependent self-construal will be used to identify the construct of relational self-construal. Although the two types of relationships categorically differ, I plan to interpret such relationship quality assessments for both friendships and romantic relationships. Does an indication of high levels of relational-interdependent self-construal correlate with high relationship quality?

Ultimately, this study examines the following questions:

- Does relationship quality correlate with levels of relational-interdependent self-construal?
- Are ratings of relationship quality and relational-interdependent self-construal significantly different for friendships and romantic relationships?

I hypothesize that there will be a strong positive correlation between relationship quality and relational interdependency. Specifically, I believe high levels of relational-interdependent self-construal will be positively correlated with relationship quality. It is my position that the data will support these hypotheses for both of the studied populations, same-sex friendships and opposite-sex romantic relationships.

The independent variable will be relational-interdependent self-construal and the dependent variable will be relationship quality. Relational-interdependent self-construal is defined as a measure of individuals' self-representations in which they are classified by degree of interdependence, as mediated by motivations of self or others. This construct will be measured by means of the RISC scale proposed by Cross, Bacon, and Morris (2000). Relationship quality can be measured because theoretical similarities exist between friendships and romantic relationships; namely, these shared dimensions include companionship, help, security, closeness, and conflict. The scores for relationship quality will be acquired by means of one of two self-report surveys, either the Friendship Quality Survey or the Romance Quality Survey (Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, & Tani, 2010), dependent on the individual's reported relationship status. For a romantic relationship,

the individual must have been, and currently be, in the relationship with a person of the opposite sex for a period of at least three months. If an individual does not have a romantic relationship that aligns with the above requirements, then he or she will take the survey pertaining to friendship quality. The measures of both relational-interdependent self-construal and relationship quality will be measured by means of a self-report Likert-scale within an online survey.

From my findings, I hope to supplement the body of research on relationship quality, especially as it relates to relational-interdependent self-construal. I hope to encourage further theoretical comparisons between friendships and romantic relationships. While there are significant differences between the two, the presence of similarities may prove beneficial to persons who seek to fulfill intimacy needs but are not presently in a romantic relationship. Additionally, the results will provide greater reason to conduct additional studies on the subject of relationship quality as it relates to individualistic motivations. Ultimately, because people maintain differing levels of relational construal, it is beneficial to study how such distinctions affect relationship quality for both same-sex friendships and opposite-sex romantic relationships.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

During the period of emerging adulthood, the formation of relationships is important for identity (Arnett, 2007). Relationships aid in the fulfillment of emotional and social needs, satisfying the inherent need to belong, as proposed by Maslow (Demir et al., 2011). Specifically, relationships provide a trusting and secure environment in which mutual self-disclosure can occur. Although categorically different, both friendships and romantic relationships contribute to identity formation.

This literature review will address research pertaining to emerging adults, followed by topics of friendships, romantic relationships, and the measurement of relational self-construal itself. Throughout the review, the role of closeness within relationship quality will be examined, as expressed through the concept of intimacy. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to examine the correlations that have been identified between relational-interdependent self-construal and the constructs of motivation, relationship quality, and identity.

Emerging Adulthood

Within the past twenty years, there has been the speculation of the existence of an intermediate developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, termed “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, Ramos, & Jensen, 2001). This stage occurs between the developmental milestones described by Erikson, relating to either identity formation or the lack thereof (Arnett, 2007; Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009). Historically, persons in their early 20s rapidly entered adulthood, married, and began

their careers (Hamilton, 2012). However, as of recently, the average age for marriage has advanced to the late 20s (Willoughby & Carroll, 2010), highlighting the importance of forming non-romantic relationships for the fulfillment of intimacy needs.

In itself, friendship serves an important role in emerging adulthood. A study ($N = 314$; 124 men, 187 women; age range 18-29, mean 21.17) by Demir (2010) illustrates the fact that happiness is connected with the relationship quality of friendships for emerging adults who are not in a romantic relationship. This emphasizes the importance of friendship for social encounters (Bunnell et al., 2012), especially during the period of emerging adulthood. From these statements, it is evident that, during emerging adulthood, relationships are important for the fulfillment of emotional and social needs.

Multiple studies by Arnett focused on the population of emerging adults, seeking to provide a comprehensive picture of the distinct elements of persons during this stage. From the foundation provided by Arnett's (2001) original study depicting the stage of emerging adulthood, Arnett, Ramos, and Jensen (2001) conducted a study ($N = 140$; 74 males, 66 females; age range 20-29 years) on the primary ethical views adopted by emerging adults. Although results were hypothesized to lean toward individualistic motivations, emerging adults displayed about equal priorities for both autonomy and community ethics. This study drew from a comprehensive sample of emerging adults from multiple educational levels. From another study on emerging adults, Arnett (2007) describes emerging adulthood as a time when self-development occurs alongside a

gradually increasing interpersonal focus. He describes the progression as balanced and a healthy developmental process. In summary, such research by Arnett presents an image of the transition of focus that occurs during the stage of emerging adulthood, especially in regards to the nature of self-serving motivations.

With emerging adults' postponed achievements of the developmental goals of career formation and marital unions, the question of the markers of adulthood arises (Skaletz & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Building on previous studies on emerging adulthood, a study by Arnett (2001) dealt with the typical criteria essential for the transition to adulthood. Three age groups (total $N = 519$), adolescents ($N = 171$; ages 13-19), emerging adults ($N = 179$; ages 20-29), and young-to-midlife adults ($N = 165$, ages 30-55), were asked to identify which criteria best classified someone as an adult; across the groups, all four of the highly associated items fell within the subscale of individualism. Essentially, this study demonstrated the overall perceptions toward the markers of adulthood; two of the four elements, individualism and taking responsibility, were seen as most indicative of being an adult.

While individualistic motivations are important in the definition of adulthood, social relationships also cannot be ignored (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010). Although friendships are related to emerging adult's reports of happiness (Demir, 2010), romantic relationships have not ceased to be important for emerging adults. A study by Bleske-Rechek, VandenHeuel, and Wyst (2009) was performed to examine differences in mate preferences between persons at different stages of the college experience. The three groups were 18-19 year olds ($N = 59$; 27 males, 32 females), 20-21 year olds ($N = 138$; 53 males, 85 females), and 22-25 year olds ($N = 91$; 38 males, 53 females). From this

study, although the belief was expressed by most of the college students surveyed that mating desires became more serious as one progressed through collegiate education, basic male and female mating preferences and desires did not differ across age groups.

Expounding on the result of the study carried out by Bleske-Rechek, VandenHeul, and Wyt (2009), some gender differences arose in the preferences. Females, as opposed to males, indicated a greater importance for their mate to have similar values and a desire for children, while males gave higher ratings to physical attractiveness and emotional stability. Additionally, males reported a greater amount of short-term mating strategy preferences. According to the cross-sectional data, these trends did not change in a drastic manner when comparing the results from each age group. It should be mentioned that cross-sectional data might not accurately represent the trend because of the presence of potential confounding variables in the different cohorts. Despite this possibility, this study indicated the state of the mating attitudes and values held by participants during the specific time measured. Overall, contrary to the opinions held by most of the college students in the study, the dating trends and preferences for males and females underwent little change throughout the college experience.

Ultimately, for the period of emerging adulthood, the desire for intimacy and being valued as a person remains, even though the capability to take responsibility and provide for a family often does not exist (Hamilton, 2012). Trends have occurred for the delay of marriage, but most emerging adults continue to deem marriage as an important goal and marker of adulthood. Although dating preferences and mating strategies differ between men and women, these trends are stable throughout the ages of 18-26.

Relationship formation continues to be important in the development of a healthy identity for emerging adults. Therefore, within the period of emerging adulthood, personal motivations for identity and intimacy are important in the formation of relationships for the fulfillment of such needs.

Friendship

As social beings, persons desire to form relationships, satisfying the inherent need to belong, as proposed by Maslow (Demir et al., 2011). One of these types of relationships, friendship, involves “mutual trust, reciprocal care and fondness” (Bunnell et al., 2012, p. 499). For a friendship to be classified as “healthy,” certain elements must be present. To build the foundation of a trusting friendship, each friend must perceive that he or she does indeed matter to the other friend (Demir et al., 2011). Once persons are assured of at least some degree of safety within the relationship, mutual self-disclosure occurs. Consequently, emotional bonding follows the incorporation of such mutual trust and interest. As one invests resources into a friendship, one begins to attribute a greater level of importance to that relationship (Ledbetter, Griffin, & Sparks, 2007). These elements of relationship quality mediate the work to undertake to strengthen the bonds of friendship.

Prototypical Elements of Friendship Intimacy

Fehr (2004) conducted a study that illustrated the prototypical elements that characterize friendship intimacy. After distributing a qualitative questionnaire eliciting the factors associated with an intimate friendship ($N = 121$; 35 men, 86 women; average

age 21 years, $SD = 6.18$), the results were coded to identify frequencies of thought. From the trends that persons deemed important, Fehr conducted further studies on the elements of friendship, seeking to provide validation for the occurrence of these basic elements. From her research composed of a variety of studies, Fehr discovered approximately 40 prototypical responses that were essential to friendship intimacy.

Included within Fehr's list was the element of self-disclosure. Such action involves the risk-taking endeavor of revealing genuine thoughts and feelings (Hacker, 1981). Within friendship, intimate self-disclosure occurs. In their study ($N = 50$; 28 males, 22 females), Rubin & Shenker (1978) found that there is a positive relationship between levels of friendship and degrees of disclosure. For both males and females, self-disclosure was greater between friends than for mere acquaintances. Additionally, these researchers found that, on topics related to interpersonal matters, female pairs of roommates reported higher degrees of disclosure than did male pairs of roommates. The nature of the sex differences in reported disclosure is a point to be further explored (Morry, 2005), especially because studies have encountered differing trends related to this variable (Reisman, 1990; Dolgin & Kim, 1994; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Similar to this study, Kito (2005) found that for both American ($N = 64$; 36 men, 24 women, 4 did not indicate gender; age range 18-47 years, mean 22.20, $SD = 4.62$) and Japanese college students ($N = 81$; 34 men, 39 women, 8 did not indicate gender) disclosure occurs at higher rates for same-sex friendships than for cross-sex friendships.

Examination of these studies illustrates the multicultural applicability of the concept that amount of disclosure corresponds with degree of intimacy. Therefore, cross-culturally and for both males and females, self-disclosure, as a relationship quality construct, corresponds with friendship intimacy.

Not only is this construct of self-disclosure said to occur within an intimate friendship, it is also an important aspect of the relationship itself. According to Fehr (2004), self-disclosure composes a substantial portion of persons' expectancy for the goal of intimacy. Fehr examined the prototypical interactions that direct the formation of intimate friendships. In her research, she identified that self-disclosure, emotional support, and loyalty were all included within a person's expectations. Similarly, within a longitudinal study on friendship ($N = 45$ dyads, male-male dyads = 15, female-female dyads = 17, and male-female platonic dyads = 13; age range 18-25 years at initial phase), it was found that effective communication between members mediates the strength of the friendship (Ledbetter et al, 2007). In summary, high levels of mutual self-disclosure and good communication are important aspects of a friendship characterized by intimacy.

Another aspect of friendship, conflict, relates to the manner in which men and women work through disagreements. In a study of undergraduate students ($N = 334$; 131 men, 203 women) using hypothetical vignettes, Keener, Strough, and DiDonato (2012), illustrate the similarities and differences between romantic relationships and same-gender friendships. In same-gender friendships, both men and women were similarly prone to apply agentic strategies; these types of strategies imply a lack of mutual decision-making. For romantic relationships, women were more likely than men to use agentic strategies in conflict resolution. Also in romantic relationships, both men and women were "equally

likely” (p. 91) to use communal strategies to resolve the conflict. Therefore, although males and females have a great deal of similarity in how they resolve same-gender conflict, the manner in which romantic relationship conflicts are handled can differ for men and women.

Gender Differences in Friendship

Although friendship is “equally important” to both males and females (Roy, Benenson, & Lilly, 2000, p. 99), gender differences cannot be ignored in the typical patterns of friendship interactions. According to a study on sex differences in styles of intimacy-related interactions conducted by Roy, Benenson, and Lilly (2000), some subtle variances were found between male and female friendship intimacy. There were two age groups surveyed: older adolescents ($N = 77$; 23 men, 54 women; mean age 27.88, $SD = 7.42$) and younger adolescents ($N = 93$; 30 boys, 63 girls; mean age 17.71, $SD = 0.67$). From their study, females were found to be more responsive than males in times of sorrow and success. Garfield (2010) also indicates that strict cultural definitions of masculinity often mediate males’ emotional disclosures. Although male and female friendship intimacy differences are not too distinctive, the differences may be attributed with rigid societal expectations.

A study by Felmlee, Sweet, and Sinclair (2012) illustrated the gender differences in permissible or expected friendship behavior. From their study ($N = 263$; men = 68, female = 195; range 18-25 years), it was found that women consistently “expressed higher standards for their relationships” (p. 524) than did men; these standards related to subjects of veracity and faithfulness and they applied to women’s friendships both with

men and with other women. The results also indicated that men had higher confidentiality expectations for women than for men, along with other forms of verbal integrity. Similarly, Fuhrman, Flannagan, and Matamoros (2009) found that in behavioral expectations for same sex friendships, women recorded significantly higher levels of expectation than men did. As a whole, no significant differences existed between the genders for statements directly referring to friendship rules. In sum, these studies demonstrate the fact that both genders place certain standards and levels of importance on friendships; such relationships are important sources of intimacy for both males and females.

Mattering and Interpersonal Happiness

While friendship dynamics may be changing because of human mobility and technological trends (Bunnell et. al, 2012; Manago, Taylor, & Greenfield, 2012), the desire to matter to others remains important. Mattering, in which a person feels significant and of worth, has been associated with levels of self-esteem and psychological wellness (Thomas, 2011). Demir, Özen, Doğan, Bilyk, and Tyrell (2011) conducted research to analyze the importance of perceived mattering in relation to relationship quality's role in happiness. From their studies of undergraduates (study 1: $N = 196$; 59 men, 137 women; mean age 23.50, $SD = 5.04$) (study 2: $N = 255$; 69 men, 176 women; mean age 19.17, $SD = 1.67$), mattering to others, denoted by having a sense of belonging, was positively associated with friendship quality. The closeness of the friendship

directed “the association between friendship quality and happiness” (Demir et al., 2011). Ultimately, this illustrates the influential role that feeling significant to others has on one’s own self-esteem and mental wellbeing.

Morry, Reich, and Kito (2010) exemplify this concept of mattering in a study on self- and partner-enhancement. For their study, both a University sample ($N = 182$; 73 men, 108 women, one did not report gender; 19.67 average age, $SD = 2.97$) and a community sample ($N = 94$; 28 men, 66 women; age range 20-61 years old, 43.14 mean age, $SD = 9.84$) was obtained. The results indicated that a person’s perception of others’ responses was associated with friendship quality. As cited in a review of the article by Elliot, Kao, and Grant (2004), relationship mattering is described as bidirectional with components of both importance and reliance (Rayle, 2006). When one engages in partner-enhancement, one illustrates a sense of dedication to the relationship. In the study by Morry, Reich, and Kito (2010), the existence of partner-enhancement, in which one rates his or her partner more positively than one’s self, was found to be highly related to feeling understood and validated. In a relationship, these mutual perceptions of mattering can lead to higher levels of relationships quality, as each person feels valued by the other.

Ultimately, these studies indicate that analogous levels of mutual self-disclosure are associated with feeling important and having emotional security within a relationship. For the most part, gender differences are not significant in identifying individuals’ assessments and desires for friendships. Such differences themselves are minimal and mostly correspond with differing interpretations and expectations of the dynamics of the relationship. Across genders, the importance of the presence of trust and intimacy cannot

be denied in the development of healthy friendships. As part of the expectations for friendships, and central to the construct of intimacy, self-disclosure and perceptions of mattering to the other mediate levels of relationship quality. Specifically, these behaviors combine to form an estimated level of friendship intimacy. In essence, the social elements of belonging and feeling important to another are fulfilled in the sense of emotional security provided by the dynamics of healthy, mutually self-disclosing friendships.

Romantic Relationships

From the foundation of mutual trust and interest found in friendships (Bunnell et al., 2012), stronger bonds of intimacy can be developed. Intimacy involves mutuality in levels of self-disclosure, emotional expression, support, and trust (Gaia, 2002). Romantic relationships involve the presence of both positive affect and emotional intimacy, as illustrated in the concept of closeness. Inherent within emotional intimacy is some element of risk-taking, with the potential for rejection; however, such a process is necessary for the growth of trust. Additionally, within the relationship itself, some degree of identity alteration occurs. This alteration may also occur during the process of mate selection through the presence of either a conscious or a subconscious motivation to pair with someone who demonstrates socially acceptable traits. Therefore, each of these factors combines to form the intimacy-building and identity-forming environment of romantic relationships.

Similarities with Friendships

In the differing contexts of both same-sex friendships and romantic relationships, a person expects the other to engage in behaviors that promote emotional closeness (Fuhrman et al., 2009). Within a romantic relationship, the dynamics of a healthy friendship are incorporated. A study by Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2010), illustrates five basic dimensions of friendship present in assessing the quality of romantic relationships. The research consisted of friendships (total $N = 698$), broken into early-adolescents ($N = 232$; 108 males, 124 females; age range 12-14, mean age 13.08, $SD = .79$), middle adolescents ($N = 233$; 109 males, 124 females; age range 16-18, mean age 17.12, $SD = .71$), and early-adults ($N = 233$; 101 males, 132 females, age range 20-23, mean age 21.77, $SD = .80$). For the research on romantic relationships (total $N = 431$), the groups were broken into middle-adolescents ($N = 205$, 87 males, 118 females; age range 16-19, mean age 17.68, $SD = .87$) and early-adults ($N = 226$; 92 males, 134 females; age range 20-23, mean age 21.75, $SD = .80$). All participants had Italian backgrounds. The friendship dimensions included the following: companionship, conflict, help, security, and closeness. Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2010), formed a measurement (the RQS) to compare these five dimensions of friendship with those of romantic relationships. The two measures, the Friendship Quality Scale (FQS) and the Romance Qualities Scale (RQS) used the same theoretical basis in the foundation of both friendships and romantic relationships (Ponti et al., 2010). Therefore, this research illustrates the versatility of their proposed scale of relationship quality, as it refers to type of relationship.

In studies of intimacy, the definition of closeness has often been connected to a combination of commitment, communication, and caring (Ledbetter et al., 2007). This operational definition of closeness parallels the combined measures of companionship and closeness within the relationship quality scales that Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2010) proposed. Closeness, as described in narrative form by persons not steeped in the discipline of psychological study, has been referred to as necessary for intimacy but has the possibility to occur outside of an intimate relationship (Gaia, 2002). Affect, which involves positive and caring feelings for another (Eryılmaz and Atak, 2009), is connected to the concept of closeness. The combination of these relational dynamics serves to produce a perception of closeness within the friendship or romantic relationship. Essentially, the construct of closeness within relationships has been repeatedly connected with that of intimacy; closeness involves the presence of feelings of commitment and positive affect, as illustrated by time and efforts spent in communication.

Emotional Intimacy

Within the safe environment of trust and closeness, couples who have high relationship quality demonstrate emotional intimacy. In its very nature, emotional intimacy requires the foundation of mutual trust, closeness and affection (Lawrence et al., 2011). This intimate interaction is one of vulnerability, characterized by self-disclosure. Within the expression of emotional intimacy, there is the involvement of learned skills connected to healthy relational actions. For the study reported by Boden, Fischer, and Niehuis (2010), emotional intimacy at Wave 1 corresponded with participants' closest relationships at the time, either friendship or romantic relationship. Although other

influencing factors may play a role in these results, a longitudinal study ($N = 422$ individuals, 210 males, 212 females, average age 23.57 at Wave 1, $SD = 2.38$) showed that level of emotional intimacy during emerging adulthood predicted classification of marital adjustment 25 years later. Therefore, emotional intimacy may be supported by the practice of skills in which one engages in intimacy-promoting behaviors.

Similar to the linking of interpersonal skills with healthy intimate relationships, there is relational value in the ability to both communicate and interpret emotions (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005). Part of emotional intimacy, emotional intelligence refers to a degree of emotional regulation and understanding of self. Cordova et al. (2005) measured such skills in marital relationships ($N = 92$ married couples; age range 19-78 years, mean age for husbands 41.0, mean age for wives 38.8), and found that deficits in emotional skills might reduce levels of health and happiness. Consequently, the presence of emotional skillfulness is seen to play a role in the health of romantic relationships, including, but not limited to, behaviors involving self-regulation and communication of emotions.

In order to form healthy relationships, emotional intelligence must exist within the individuals. In a study of romantic intimacy ($N = 220$; 106 males, 114 females; mean age 23.5), Eryılmaz and Atak (2009) found various classifications of intimacy, specifically that of cognitive and affective, to be essential in the beginnings of romantic intimacy during emerging adulthood. From this foundational importance of both cognition and emotion-based intimacy, Schröder-Abé and Schütz (2011) address romantic relationship quality. From their research, Schröder-Abé and Schütz found that the presence of emotional intelligence was positively related to measures of relationship satisfaction and

closeness. Schröder-Abé and Schütz compiled the data from both relationship partners ($N = 80$ couples, mean age for males 35.7, mean age for females 33.6), specifically illustrating the role of emotional intelligence in construal of relationship quality. In summary, due to the presence of both self and other-understanding inherent within emotional intimacy, cognitions and emotions play a significant role in classifications of high relationship quality, especially in romantic relationships.

Emotional Risk-Taking

The process of emotional risk-taking involves engaging in disclosures that have the potential to be negatively appraised by the partner; such disclosures are mediated by vulnerability. Even outside of romantic relationships, emotional risk-taking can be connected with intimacy. In a nonromantic, males-only study measuring perception of intimacy ($N = 30$, age range 18-32 years, mean age 22.5), Howell and Conway (1990), showed that negative emotional expressions and disclosures were rated as more intimate than corresponding positive ones. Essentially, the decision to engage in emotional risk-taking is an intimate endeavor and, typically, such behavior only occurs in relationships in which there is a high level of trust.

Emotional risk-taking is also associated with romantic relationship contexts. Phenomenological research by Carter and Carter (2010) illustrates the necessity for trust to be present within romantic couples before emotional risk-taking can occur. In their research, Carter and Carter's (2010) had a sample of six individuals, three male and three female, each person in a marital relationship. From their research, men generally viewed emotional risk-taking as an action in which they would be perceived as weak. Women's

fears toward such vulnerability were found to be in conjunction with fears of rejection. A review of the literature on emotional intimacy illustrates that gender differences in expression of intimacy are often mediated by differing social expectations for males and females (Gaia, 2002; Garfield, 2010). Essentially, emotional risk-taking involves choosing to be vulnerable in a relationship even though doing so could result in an undesired response or perception.

Even though some degree of fear accompanies emotional risk-taking, the vulnerability results in the growth of trust. To examine the interplay between negative cogitation and trust, Murray, Pinkus, Holmes, Harris, Gomillion, Aloni, Derrick, and Leder (2011) conducted a study of persons in romantic relationships. Their sample size was 82 individuals, 48 men and 34 women (mean age 19.3 years of age, $SD = 1.8$). From their research, they found that having high levels of implicit trust can help a person see more traits that are positive in one's romantic partner, even when the person is ruminating on an event during which the partner caused pain (Murray et al., 2011). This increase in ease occurs because the person does not feel that the trusted other will respond with rejection or abandonment (Madey & Rodgers, 2009). Ultimately, high levels of emotional intimacy can have lasting positive effects on relationships, preserving levels of trust, even during painful ruminations.

Within the concept of emotional risk-taking, in which disclosures may produce unfavorable consequences, one's perception of vulnerability may mediate the extent of the sharing. Feelings of trust in the partner and security in the relationship may decrease anxiety toward intimate emotional sharing (Denes, 2012). In their analyses of a longitudinal study on self-disclosure conducted with romantic partners ($N = 202$

individuals, 101 dating couples; 20 years mean age at Time 1), Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) described the correlation between one's degree of self-disclosure and one's perception of a partner's level of self-disclosure. In a different study over a weeklong period, Crystal Jiang and Hancock (2013) highlighted perceived partner responsiveness as a mediator of self-disclosure in intimacy for couples who were not geographically close. This example of perceived partner responsiveness was illustrated through a diary study on intimacy comparison between long distant ($N = 30$) and geographically close ($N = 33$) heterosexual dating couples ($N = 63$ couples; average age 20.97 years, $SD = 2.55$). Therefore, concerning vulnerability in romantic relationships, these studies demonstrate that mutuality represents an essential component for decisions to engage in self-disclosure.

Each of these studies emphasizes the presence of emotional risk-taking as fundamental to the action of self-disclosure. Emotional risk-taking involves uncertainty, especially as it relates to the possibility of an undesirable outcome (Carter & Carter, 2010; Cordova et al., 2005). While such an endeavor does have its potential for negative outcomes, emotional risk-taking is essential for the sustainment of a healthy romantic relationship. As trust is established in the relationship, the willingness to engage in risk-taking behaviors increases, leading to a greater tendency to be emotionally vulnerable in the relationship. In summary, although emotional risk-taking is often associated with fear, its role in growing trust, and therefore intimacy, cannot be denied.

Motivations in Romantic Relationships

Within romantic relationships, there can be various attitudes toward both the activities and the health of the relationship. Gaine and La Guardia (2009), illustrate the distinctness of these two types of motivations. From their research on undergraduate students in romantic relationships, they found that relational well-being can be better predicted when one examines the motivations for relational activities and for maintaining the relationship itself. Within their study ($N = 246$; 112 men, 134 women; average age 19.5, age range 17-43, $SD = 3.05$), feelings of autonomy were found to mediate a person's "commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within the relationship" (p. 195). Pertaining to activities within the relationship, a greater willingness to engage in such activities was significantly related to higher levels of relationship well-being. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the importance of both autonomy and willingness in connection with relational motivation.

In addition to providing a source of intimacy, such romantic relationships are often associated with identity-related goals (Barry et al., 2009). Within the motivations for being in a relationship, three have been identified as distinct concepts; these include intimacy goals, identity goals, and status goals (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2012). Each of these elements corresponds with powerful social needs; identity and intimacy, developmentally, are especially associated with late adolescents and emerging adults. From the study carried out by Zimmer-Gembeck and associates (2012), it was found that persons 20 years or older ($N = 249$; 85 males, 164 females; mean age 20.6, $SD = 3.8$) reported a greater quantity of intimacy dating goals than persons ages 16-19 ($N = 121$). Additionally, females reported a greater number of identity-related goals than males did,

with males displaying little disparity between amounts of identity and intimacy dating goals. Consistently, a greater number of persons who were in a romantic relationship identified as having higher numbers of intimacy-related goals than persons who were not in such a relationship. In summary, emerging adults have great numbers of both identity and intimacy-related goals that they seek to accomplish through romantic relationships, with intimacy goals reported more frequently by persons aged at least 20 years old.

In romantic relationships, for the process of partner selection, it is important to have evidence of the person's socially desirable qualities. Through her research, Cann (2004) implies that the strengths and weaknesses of the romantic partner are often reflected onto oneself. Pertaining to such self-concept description, a person becomes more prone to identify as having a certain characteristic if a potential romantic partner also shares it (Slotter & Gardner, 2012). This statement alone mediates the decision-making process in the selection of a romantic partner, emphasizing the need to seek out a person who evidences both stable and socially desirable qualities. Such studies on changes in self-description in view of current or potential romantic partners illustrate the malleability of the self in the context of romantic relationships.

Ultimately, this goal of romantic relationship intimacy results in a singular focus of attention, giving less energy toward friendships (Demir, 2010). While romantic relationships may share some common elements with friendships, the identity motivations in romantic relationships are unique. Self-disclosure, working toward the growth of trust, is a central element in the development of emotional intimacy. For romantic relationships in particular, motivations that correspond with the health of the relationship correspond with an increase in relational wellbeing. In such an instance, the

romantic relationship becomes the primary source of intimacy and has important connections with the growth of personal identity. Therefore, it is important for a romantic relationship to have a foundation of trust and emotional intimacy, both for the sake of the individual's identity and for the health of the couple's relationship.

Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal

Relational-interdependent self-construal (RISC) refers to the degree to which one defines oneself in relation with close others (Cross et al., 2000). The concept of relational self-construal relates to a cognitive framework, especially as it concerns an individual's self-appraisal. High levels of RISC have been correlated with actions related to clustering words and forming relational links in the process of organizing incoming information. Additionally, high levels of RISC have been connected with a greater tendency for self-disclosure, perceived closeness, and commitment within a relationship (Cross et al, 2000). Independent and interdependent construals of the self have been beneficial in cross-cultural studies between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Kiuchi, 2006). Although individualistic cultures place a high priority on the independent self, the influence of social forces and groups should not be ignored. Ultimately, persons derive identity from a variety of sources, but the level of relational-interdependent self-construal reflects the manner in which one mentally organizes and interprets information, especially information related to the self.

Other Measures of Self-Construal and Cognitive Frameworks

To measure self-construal, both Singelis (1994) and Cross, Bacon, and Morris (2000) have proposed scales. Singelis' (1994) measure, because it does not examine social influences, has been cited to have low reliability in measuring self-construal (van Horen, Pöhlmann, Koeppen, & Hannover, 2008). The measure proposed by Cross, Bacon, and Morris (2000), accounts for the examination of cognitive influence with the incorporation of social factors. In measuring such combined influences, the RISC scale is not limited to a dichotomous view of interpretation specifically formatted for cross-cultural comparison.

Through research, self-construal has been evaluated in regards to relationship quality, identity formation, and social goals (van Horen et al., 2008). Related to the influence of self-concepts, implicit self-concepts may affect the evaluations of close others (Dehart, Pelham, Fiedorowicz, Carvallo, & Gabriel, 2011). For goal setting in particular, self-construal and categories of goals have been correlated; independent construals were shown to reflect a more self-focused tendency (van Horen et al., 2008). The sample for this study by van Horen, Pöhlmann, Koeppen, and Hannover was 82 undergraduate students (11 male, 71 female; mean age 25.86, SD = 5.45). A priming procedure was carried out to encourage a specific characterization of goal formation, either independent or interdependent. Although for the independent priming condition participants deemed personal goals "more relevant" (p. 217), the general characterization of a person's construal was a stronger influence on the type of goal than the priming

condition itself. Therefore, although goal setting may be somewhat affected by independent or interdependent priming conditions, the actual type of construal generates a strong effect on the motivations of the individual.

Similar to the concept of RISC, measuring the presence of idiocentric-allocentric levels corresponds with a “group-oriented notion of collectivism-based interdependence” (Morry, 2005, p. 218). While the RISC scale is typically applied in individualistic cultures, measures of idiocentrism-allocentrism are for the sake of cross-cultural comparison. Idiocentric levels have been more commonly associated with individualistic cultures and altruism with collectivistic cultures. The construct of allocentrism has been found to contribute to relationship supportive behaviors. Morry’s (2005) study on allocentrism in a Canadian undergraduate sample of cross-sex friendships ($N = 228$; 101 men, 127 women; average age 18.78 years) illustrated the possible role of allocentric levels in the amounts of disclosure, closeness, and relationship satisfaction. In the study, women were reported to be more allocentric than men were, but, among the relationship factors of disclosure, satisfaction, and closeness, this was the only gender difference. Although the study used an allocentrism measure with poor reliability, the findings illustrate the need for allocentrism to be studied in a relationship-specific manner. Ultimately, the measurement of allocentrism is important for cross-cultural studies for the sake of identifying closeness and relationship satisfaction, in samples of both cross-sex and same-sex friends.

Given that the construct of RISC refers to a cognitive mindset, studies on collective mental representations of the self further illustrate the influence of cognitive manifestations. Two studies on undergraduates (study 1: $N = 200$; 77 men, 123 women;

average age 20 years) (study 2: $N = 76$; 22 men, 54 women; average age 21 years) by Agnew, Rusbult, Van Lange, and Langston (1998) demonstrate the connection between mental representations and interdependence in romantic relationships. The results of their studies converge in the promotion of the influential role of commitment exemplified both in measures of implicit and explicit representations of interdependence. Overall, these research endeavors illustrate the influence of cognitive frameworks, illustrated in implicit measures, in the process of describing one's romantic relationships.

The RISC Scale

Specifically, the relational-interdependent self is illustrated by ratings on the RISC scale. Low ratings on the RISC scale are often connected with less influence of relationships on one's identity. High ratings on the RISC scale connect with an individual's view of himself or herself as connected to others (Cross et al., 2000). The RISC scale proposed by Cross, Bacon, and Morris provides a way to indicate the extent to which one classifies himself or herself in reference to close others without exclusively measuring for individualistic characterizations of construal. Through a set of studies carried out by Cross, Morris, and Gore (2002), it was found that persons who scored higher on the RISC scale clustered incoming information in terms of couples. In summary, this research illustrates that high scores on the RISC scale correspond with a person's greater degree of interdependent association of self.

To further their previous research on relationship quality, Cross, Morris, and Gore (2006) carried out a study to indicate the correspondence between relational self-construal and intimacy. The sample was composed of 241 undergraduate students (41

male, 200 female). A questionnaire containing a relationship quality index and the RISC scale was given to two newly matched same-sex college roommates; the individuals separately filled out the survey at Time 1 and one month later at Time 2. At the end of the study, the answers of roommates were compared and analyzed, especially focusing on the overall perceptions of the quality of the relationship. The relationship quality index taken by the participants reported ratings of subjective closeness between the roommates. For this study, the results indicated that the two collegiate roommates' RISC scores and their relationship quality scores were positively related to self-reports of emotional disclosure between the individuals. Additionally, the RISC scale scores corresponded with reported levels of self-disclosure and with perception of roommate's responsiveness. Although this study relies highly on self-report measures, the findings reflect interesting trends regarding a person's perception of relationship satisfaction. As a whole, this study illustrates the importance of self-reports of relationship quality and perceived partner involvement in the levels of relationship quality for the relational unit.

From such a foundation of relational-interdependent self-construal by Cross and other researchers, a thorough study on relationship quality by Morry and Kito (2008) sought to examine the relationships between RISC scores, relationship quality, satisfaction, and the presence of relationship-supportive behaviors. The population of the study consisted of Canadian undergraduate students ($N = 253$) broken up into one of two groups measuring either same-sex friendships ($N = 133$; 59 men, 74 women) or cross-sex friendships ($N = 120$; 49 men, 71 women); for both groups, the average age was 19.80 ($SD = 3.72$). From their results, individuals who had high RISC scores illustrated, by means of a survey, a greater tendency to engage in relationship-supportive behaviors.

This information is in conjunction with previous studies that relate to the pro-social tendencies of persons who have interdependent self-construals (Utz, 2004). As a whole, these studies illustrate the correlations of RISC scores with certain socially oriented behavioral tendencies.

In conclusion, using the RISC scale, the relative influence of relational self-construal on one's identity can be identified, with degrees ranging from little to substantial influence. This scale accounts for both individualistic tendencies and social influences present in relationships. Various studies have indicated the correlation between RISC score and relationship-oriented behavioral tendencies. Additionally, persons with high RISC scores tend to view themselves through the lenses of their relationships with others; correlations have been found for such scores with increased amounts of pro-social behavior and relationship-supportive behaviors. Although the RISC scale is primarily fashioned for individualistic cultures, it succeeds as a measure of both individualistic and social motivations in the cognitive mindsets of individuals. Ultimately, relational-interdependent self-construal is connected with relationship quality through an increase in occurrences of socially oriented values in general and relationship-supportive behaviors in particular.

Conclusion

Relationship quality is an important element within the developmental period of emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is a time in which both identity and intimacy goals begin to be fulfilled. Friendships provide a means for persons to experience elements of intimacy, specifically feeling important and engaging in mutual self-

disclosure. Romantic relationships involve a deeper and more personal connection with another person, thus amplifying the beneficial elements of friendships. Self-construal, especially through evaluation using the RISC scale, is important in the continued understanding of the correlations between higher ratings of relationship quality and pro-social behaviors. Therefore, the importance of studying relationship quality is seen in its role in identity formation throughout emerging adulthood, as can be measured for both types of intimate relationships using the RISC scale.

Ultimately, this culminates in the question of the strength of the interaction between relational-interdependent self-construal and relationship quality, and, specifically, if friendships and romantic relationships correspond with significantly different scores of relational-interdependent self-construal. From this research, would persons who had cognitive mindsets corresponding with higher levels of interdependence demonstrate greater levels of dedication to their relationships? Would this mindset of greater interdependence translate such personal relational commitment into higher levels of quality for both friendships and romantic relationships? The proceeding study aims to answer these questions by comparing results of relational-interdependent self-construal with relationship quality in examples of both friendships and romantic relationships.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

For the project, I conducted a study on relationship quality and self-construal. I aimed to examine the strength of the correlation between relationship quality and degree of relational-interdependent self-construal. This interaction was to be examined separately for romantic relationships and friendships. The goal of this study was to identify the influence of self-construal within self-reports of relationship quality. Ultimately, these efforts served to elucidate the association between the quality of a relationship and self-construal, comparing levels of self-construal in both friendships and romantic relationships.

The research method was a correlational study measuring, within the contexts of both friendships and romantic relationships, the constructs of relational-interdependent self-construal and relational closeness. After examining the literature, I found that self-report questionnaires are often used to procure data on subjects of relationship quality and self-construal. Although relationship quality is best studied in simulations of real-life situations, research has indicated that self-report questionnaires can produce comparable data. All of this considered, I distributed an online survey at the campus of Southeastern University through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. Therefore, the study was drawn from an online survey with self-report questionnaires separately measuring relationship quality and relational self-construal.

The study was formatted so that any person enrolled at Southeastern University between the ages of 18 and 26 was eligible for participation in the study. I determined the age bracket for this selection by examining typical classifications of emerging adults, illustrated throughout psychological literature. Typically, persons during this age group

place the forming of intimate relationships, whether friendship or romantic, as high in priority. Consequently, I sought to examine the specific influence of relational self-construal on relationship quality for the emerging adult population. Each person's relationship status determined which of the two surveys to fill out; each survey pertained to either a same-sex friendship or an opposite-sex romantic relationship. Therefore, those within the stated age bracket were not excluded based on relationship status or any other demographical indicator.

Although the surveys themselves involved solely self-reported data, this was not too great of a limitation to my research due to the nature of this study. Through examining the research on motivations of individuals, I found that people work to fulfill basic social goals. Motivation to fulfill a goal, especially one pertaining to identity or intimacy, has the potential to affect the level of importance one places on achieving that goal (Gaine & La Guardia, 2009). For those with higher levels of relational-interdependent self-construal, I expected that such persons would place greater levels of importance on their relationships than those with lower levels of self-construal. This trend would be reflected in ratings of relationship quality, with higher degrees of relational-interdependent-self-construal corresponding with higher levels of relationship quality, this interaction occurring regardless of the classification of the relationship. Due to the subjective nature of self-construal, personal motivations in classifying relationship quality would likely affect the results. I hypothesized that, on average, those with high levels of relational-interdependent self-construal would indicate higher relationship quality than the averages of those with low levels of such self-construal.

Within each online survey, there were two reliable scales used to acquire data, each using some form of a Likert scale to indicate the strength of agreement with the given statement. Upon consenting to participate in the study, the participant chose the appropriate survey to take, dependent on his or her relationship status. Both surveys contained identical Relational-Interdependent Self-Concept scales to examine the level of self-construal within the individual. An example of the types of questions involved in this measure include: “In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image,” “When I establish a close friendship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person,” and “Overall, my close relationships have very little to do with how I feel about myself” (reverse scored). Research by Cross, Bacon, and Morris (2000) has reported both the internal and test-retest reliability along with the convergent, discriminant, and construct validity for such a self-construal measure.

All consenting persons took the survey containing the Friendship Quality Survey unless they were currently in a romantic relationship and had been so for a period of two full months or longer. If an individual fulfilled the above requirement, he or she took the survey containing the Romance Qualities Scale. There were 194 respondents in the romantic relationship category (153 females) and 204 respondents in the friendship category (154 females). Both versions of the survey identified relationship quality and the questions were comparable except for the exchange of the word “friend” for “partner” in the Romance Qualities Scale. Examples of the questions involved in this measure include the following: “My friend helps me when I am having trouble with something,” “If there is something bothering me, I can tell my partner about it even if it is something I cannot tell to other people,” and “After having fought, even violently, with my friend, if I

said 'sorry' to him or her, I think that he or she would continue to be angry with me” (reverse scored). Research by Ponti, Guarnieri, Smorti, and Tani (2010) has shown that these two scales can be interchangeable in regards to similarities in the theoretical framework of relationships.

For this experiment, I conducted an online campus-wide survey using the student email database. Faculty affiliated with the Department of Social Sciences and the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (directly associated with the student email database program) mediated the use of such a database. Within the email, a CAN-SPAM statement was included, in which persons could choose to have their name removed from the email list if they so desired.

After agreeing to participate in the experiment, each consenting person answered the question regarding his or her relationship status. After the demographical category of sex was obtained, the appropriate relationship quality survey was given, followed by the survey containing the relational-interdependent self-construal scale. This entire process took approximately 10 minutes.

In exchange for completion of the online survey, participants had the ability to enter their names into a drawing for a fifteen-dollar gift-card to a certain restaurant. Participants' names were not associated with the survey data and the student's names were emailed in a file separate from the content of the data. The number of data sets was recorded into an online number generator and the participants whose numbers corresponded with the generated numbers were emailed directions as to how to redeem their prize. Data were collected using the online survey program, and a code was assigned to each survey. All records were stored within the secure hard drive of the

CBSS, to be kept there for three years. After the study was completed, the information was not accessible, unless by the investigators of CBSS staff in response to matters of legality.

Based on the literature and methods of the experiment, there was little-to-no risk. The risks did not outweigh the benefit of the knowledge, and the study itself had little potential for any form of harm to the participant. Research studies measuring relationship quality and correlations between the data have not reported any harm befalling the participants due to involvement in the study. Additionally, the surveys themselves were not associated with traumatic or well-known strongly emotional cues. While the information pertained to a subject's friendship or romantic relationship, no negative repercussions were expected to result from involvement in the study.

In regards to the scoring process, there were a few answers that needed to be reversed scored, and these were taken care of appropriately for all of the surveys. For the relationship quality surveys, the answers were ranked on a scale of 1-5, with corresponding anchors of "low relationship quality" and "high relationship quality." Relational interdependent self-construal ratings were given on a scale of 1-7, anchored with "low relational interdependent self-construal" and "high relational interdependent self-construal."

Chapter 4: Results

Aggregating the data across relationship type (romantic or friendship), the sample size was 398. Of the friendship quality group, there were 204 respondents, with females consisting of 154 of the participants. For the romantic relationship quality group, there were 194 respondents, with females consisting of 153 of these participants. Other than gender and romantic relationship status, no demographic information was collected from the participants. All respondents were students at Southeastern University and were between the ages of 18-66. The original intent for the ceiling age was to be 26, as per research on emerging adult populations (Eryılmaz & Atak, 2009; Skaletz & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Arnett, 2001), but this was not successfully communicated in the informed consent screen. Consequently, the acquired answers cannot be applied to any specific stage of development or age of respondent. On the online survey, one additional male participant was excluded from the analyses due to his ranking of “7” for all questions on the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale (the scale involves two questions that are phrased for reverse scoring). Other than this one exception, all completed surveys were submitted for data analyses.

The researchers subjected the results to analyses on an independent measures t-test, which illustrated that the relationship quality and self-construal ratings were significantly different for friendships and romantic relationships, meriting separate analyses. The relationship quality mean for the romantic relationships was 4.0267, with a standard deviation of .322. The relationship quality mean for friendships was 3.7558, with a standard deviation of .505. Gender did not prove to be a confounding variable (see Table 1 for a breakdown of the scores by gender), so gender was not analyzed separately

in the correlation analyses. On an Independent Samples Test, a rating of .00 was given on a 2-tailed test for significance, in which the means for relationship quality were separated by type. This significant relationship justifies the use of separate analyses for friendships and romantic relationships.

Q3. Please select your gender:		Friendship Quality Score (sum/22)	RISC Score (average of sum)	Romance Quality Score (sum/22)
Male	Mean	3.6573	4.3357	3.9268
	N	50	91	41
	Std. Deviation	.44062	1.50863	.33861
Female	Mean	3.7878	4.4670	4.0535
	N	154	307	153
	Std. Deviation	.52167	1.51376	.31376
Total	Mean	3.7558	4.4370	4.0267
	N	204	398	194
	Std. Deviation	.50511	1.51170	.32246

Table 1: Means of FQS, RISC, and RQS analyzed by gender

Therefore, the ratings of friendship and romantic relationship quality were each correlated with ratings of relational interdependent self-construal, with significance of results mediated by a value of $p < 0.05$, as is standard for psychological research (see Tables 2 and 3 for the full correlational data). For friendship quality, the Pearson Correlation was .113 with a significance of .109. For romantic relationship quality, the Pearson Correlation was .069 with a significance of .339. Neither of these relationships resulted in statistical significance.

		RISC Score (average of sum)	Friendship Quality Score (sum/22)
RISC Score (average of sum)	Pearson Correlation	1	.113
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.109
	N	398	204
Friendship Quality Score (sum/22)	Pearson Correlation	.113	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.109	
	N	204	204

Table 2: Correlations between RISC score and FQS score

		RISC Score (average of sum)	Romance Quality Score (sum/22)
RISC Score (average of sum)	Pearson Correlation	1	.069
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.339
	N	398	194
Romance Quality Score (sum/22)	Pearson Correlation	.069	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	
	N	194	194

Table 3: Correlations between RISC score and RQS score

					Mean
RISC Score (average of sum)	Q3. Please select your gender:	Male	Q2. Are you currently in a romantic relationship in which you have been together for at least two full months?	Yes	4.53
				No	4.17
		Female	Q2. Are you currently in a romantic relationship in which you have been together for at least two full months?	Yes	4.53
				No	4.41

Table 4: RISC Scores Mediated by Gender and Relationship Classification

Comparison of Means Across Gender (friendship quality, romantic relationship quality, and RISC)

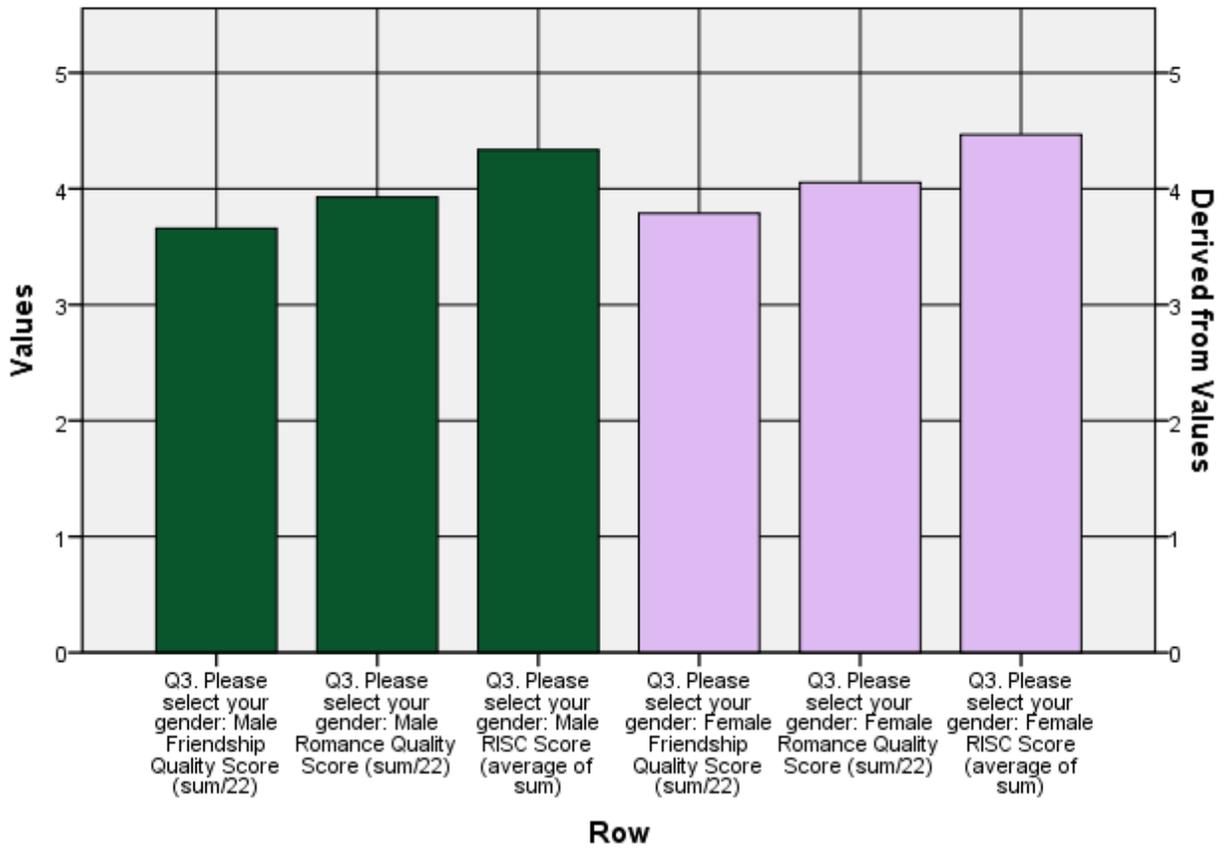


Figure 1: Comparison of Means Across Gender (FQS, RQS, and RISC)

Chapter 5: Discussion

Outcome

For the data, initial t-test analyses indicated that the scores for friendships and romantic relationships were significantly different from each other. The means for relationship quality for romantic relationships were higher than the means for friendship quality. This trend is in conjunction with prior research on relationship quality; romantic relationships often have a more powerful influence on a person's identity and life decisions than do friendships (Agnew et al., 1998; Barry et al., 2009). Specifically, this is seen in a romantic partner's inclusion into a person's own self-concept (Slotter & Gardner, 2012). Essentially, the data indicate that these two types of relationships are distinct and illustrate the different level of priorities a person ascribes to each.

In interpreting the results of the study, there were no significant correlations between relationship quality scores and RISC scores. High friendship quality scores, as measured by the FQS, were not correlated with either high or low RISC. This was also the case for romantic quality scores, as measured by the RQS. In terms of the relevance of such information, studies have indicated that RISC scale scores have been correlated with relationship-supportive behaviors and motivations (Morry & Kito, 2009). RISC corresponds with a cognitive mindset that relates to identifying oneself in relation to others (Gore et al., 2006). Because there were no distinct correlations between relationship quality scores and RISC levels, it is highly probable that multiple factors exist apart from RISC that contribute to reports of relationship quality. RISC corresponds with a cognitive mindset, but relationship quality scores are a perception of the strength of a relationship (Morry, Reich, & Kito, 2010), with interpretation mediated

by the behaviors observed (Ponti et al., 2010). With this in mind, the connection between relationship quality and RISC is weak and somewhat indirect in that depiction of self has a small role in the personal evaluation of the relationship. Ultimately, despite the reported connection between relationship-supportive behaviors and motivations and RISC, the findings of this study did not demonstrate a specific connection between RISC and reported relationship quality.

One possible reason for the difference between my results and other studies could have been due to the relationship quality inventories that I used. To my knowledge, the FQS and the RQS have not been correlated with RISC scores, although other measures of relationship quality have been used (Gore et al., 2006; Morry & Kito, 2009). The purpose of the FQS and RQS measures is to emphasize the theoretical similarities between the types of relationships; admittedly, the RQS itself does not provide a comprehensive picture of romantic relationships. Therefore, my lack of correlational strength and significance between relationship quality and RISC can mostly be attributed to the fact that the relationship quality measures that I used were purely self-report and were primarily created to establish theoretical similarities between the two types of relationships.

Interestingly, there were no significant gender differences for the responses in any of the measures (see Table 4 and Figure 1). For the most part, males and females had similar means for the ratings on the FQS, the RQS, and the RISC scale, although the means of the females were marginally greater. As it pertains to gender differences, the research has demonstrated conflicting trends on subjects of relationship quality (Dandurand & Lafontaine, 2013; Fuhrman et al., 2009; Roy & Benenson, 2000) and self-

construal (Cross et al., 2000; Gore et al., 2006; Morry & Kito, 2009). Ratings of intimacy and perceptions of relationship quality are affected by the perception of a partner's level of disclosure (Crystal Jiang & Hancock, 2013; Gore et al., 2006; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Although some gender differences may exist, research has indicated that, for both males and females, intentional and willing involvement in the growth of a relationship is connected with relationship well-being (Gaine & La Guardia, 2009). My data indicated that males and females reported similar ratings of the importance of relationships and their engagement in it. Perhaps if further studies were carried out in which relationship quality and relational-interdependent self-construal were studied more thoroughly, the females ratings on the RISC would reflect the predominate trends in the literature on self-construal.

It is possible that the religious environment associated with the population sampled mediated the extent to which persons viewed themselves in relation to close others. People often feel that their involvement with religion affects their decisions and behavior (McMurdie, 2013). Recent studies have shown that religious connection can influence interpersonal relationships (McMurdie, 2013) along with tendencies to demonstrate generosity and prosocial behaviors (Brañas-Garza, Espín, & Neuman, 2014). In a study explicitly examining psychological sense of belonging in Evangelical private universities (Bomus, Woods, & Chan, 2005), the impact of community connectedness was shown to exist as a unique factor, especially for students living on campus. This study, because of its similarity to the environment in which I conducted my research, illustrates the importance of the community and perceived connectedness in the behavior

and decisions of students. Therefore, the data from my research should be interpreted while accounting for the role of the worldview of a religious, and therefore somewhat interpersonal and altruistic, mindset.

As a whole, none of my hypotheses were confirmed. I proposed that the trends in the results would indicate that friendships and romantic relationships were similar in reports of relationship quality. As it pertains to RISC, I proposed that higher scores of relational-interdependent self-construal would have a direct positive relationship with relationship quality scores, the quality scores mediated by the RISC scores. Given that there were no significant correlational relationships identified between the variables of relationship quality and RISC, this assumption was not supported in my study.

Essentially, the results from my study disconfirmed all of my hypotheses in that there was no clear connection between one's score on the RISC and one's reported relationship quality in either a friendship or a romantic relationship.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

For this study, there were certain elements that limit the applicability of my results. First, the demographic information that I collected was very limited. The classification of gender and romantic relationship status were the only two factors that I collected from each participant. Age of participants was not acquired, although I assume that the predominant number of responses were persons within the 18-24 age range. I also did not inquire of the participants' ethnic backgrounds. Although this factor probably would not have significantly affected the data, at the very least, it would have demonstrated the degree of ethnic diversity within the sample.

An additional factor that I did not collect, marital status, could have been a confounding variable for the romantic relationship group. Research has shown that relationship quality scores typically differ between married and dating romantic couples (Morry et al., 2010). Sexual intimacy, which occurs in marital relationships, most likely was underrepresented for the romantic relationship population surveyed due to the values toward extramarital conduct held by those who classify themselves under the religious classification held by the university (Mak & Tsang, 2008). This factor of sexual intimacy in romantic relationships could have affected the level of disclosures and the presence of prototypical elements such as trust, closeness, and relational satisfaction (Denes, 2012). Therefore, these classifications of age, ethnicity, marital status, and sexual involvement would have been advantageous to obtain for the sake of isolating confounding variables and comparing the data that I obtained with results from corresponding populations of students at other collegiate institutions.

My study specifically defined the relationships studied as same-sex friendships and opposite-sex romantic relationships; however, it is possible that other classifications of relationships could have produced different results. For the most part, the literature has focused on opposite-sex romantic relationships, but exclusivity in focus has changed during the past five years to include same-sex romantic relationships in efforts to prevent discriminatory actions based on the variable of sexual orientation (Rayle, 2006). Although this particular classification of romantic relationships probably would not have occurred in the population sampled, the option of classification should have been included.

Also of interest in relationship research, the examination of cross-sex friendships has recently arisen as important to explore (Fuhrman, et al., 2009; Kito, 2005). For my study, it is possible that persons not in a romantic relationship had an opposite-sex person as a best friend. Given that only the ratings for a close same-sex friend were reported, this specific request may have affected the levels of reported relationship quality for friendships. Altogether, these variables of unaddressed types of relationships could have had confounding effects on the validity of my results, and, at the very least, should have been included for the sake of diversity.

In the study of relationship quality, rarely are variables studied using only one measure. My methodology consisted of one survey for relationship quality and one survey for relational-interdependent self-construal. In studying these variables, it is difficult to determine the reliability of the answers without having other measures with which to compare. For relationship quality, the FQS serves as a representative measure of the elements of friendship, addressing dynamics such as conflict, commitment, and closeness. While this may be sufficient for friendships, the RQS singularly measures these same dynamics. Research has indicated that romantic relationships involve greater inclusion of identity and intimacy-forming influences than friendships (Agnew et al., 1998). As of late, studies integrating the assessments of both members of either a friendship or romantic relationship dyad have been used to identify the importance of perception in reports of relational wellbeing (Lawrence et al., 2011; Morry et al., 2010; Schröder-Abé & Schütz, 2011). If this study were to be conducted in the future, the use of the technique of paired analyzing of scores would serve as a better research design for relationship quality. Additionally, the concept of self-construal, as measured by the

RISC among other scales, has been studied by both verbal and visual measures of relational identification (Cross et al., 2002; Dehart et al., 2011; Morry, 2005); when evaluated, both have been found to have comparable results. In summary, if this study were to be conducted again, multiple measures of relationship quality and self-construal should be presented and measures specifically addressing romantic relationship quality should be included.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study succeeded to provide another set of measures with which relational-interdependent self-construal was studied. The sample size was substantial and the results primarily originated from an undergraduate population of emerging adults. Ratings of relationship quality were found to be significantly different between friendships and romantic relationships, despite the theoretical similarities they share. Romantic relationships, in their nature, involve greater levels of identity formation and motivations to achieve intimacy goals. While friendships are important for some intimacy needs, identity is more profoundly impacted in the context of a romantic relationship.

As it pertains to RISC, the cognitive framework related to identifying oneself in relation to close others is important for further studies in the subject of interpersonal exchanges. RISC levels may have some influence on relationship quality, but this connection may not occur in an observable manner due to the presence of other motivational factors that moderate the interaction between relationship quality and identity. Although this study may have not demonstrated observable correlations

between relationship quality and relational-interdependent self-construal, this finding may be more a result of the specific relationship quality measures used than a reflection on the lack of a relationship between these two concepts. Relationship building is an important goal in emerging adulthood, and, for individualistic cultures, the simultaneous formation of personal identity and relational connections affects, to some degree, the manner in which persons identify themselves in relation to close others. Therefore, further research is needed in order to clarify the link between the cognitive framework of self-construal and reports of relationship quality for both friendships and romantic relationships within the unique identity and intimacy-formation period associated with emerging adulthood.

Appendix A

Informed Consent

Title of Project: Relationship quality and self-construal

Responsible Principal Investigator: Dr. Rosalind Goodrich

Other Investigator: Tabitha Ingram

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to separately investigate relationship quality in friendships and in romantic relationships and correlate these rankings of quality with rankings of self-construal, seeking to determine the strength of correlation between such constructs.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** You will complete one of two online surveys, depending on the presence of a romantic relationship in which the couple has been together for at least two months. If you do not have a romantic relationship that corresponds with the following requirements, then you will complete the survey regarding friendship quality. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Answer each question to the best of your ability; each participant's responses will have no connection with his or her name.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** You may experience minor discomfort in evaluating the quality of personal relationships, especially if such thoughts about the relationship are related to personal negative memories or cognitions.

4. **Benefits:** This research aids in the knowledge on self-construal, especially as it relates to evaluations of relationship quality. Specifically, this research will provide an additional measure of relationship quality to which self-construal is compared.

5. **Statement of Confidentiality:** Identifying information will not be connected with the research data. The Office of Institutional Research will mediate the email distribution of the surveys, separating your name from the survey's data. The data from the research will be stored in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences hard-drive, accessible only to the investigators and approved CBSS staff. No personally identifiable information will be shared.

6. **Whom to contact:**

Rosalind Goodrich	rsgoodrich@seu.edu	863-667-5164
Heather Kelly	hkelly@seu.edu	863-667-5526
Tabitha Ingram	tlingram@seu.edu	352-509-0328

Please contact Rosalind Goodrich with any questions or concerns about the research. You may also call Rosalind Goodrich if you feel you have been injured or harmed by this research. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the SEU Institutional Review Board at 863-667-5097 or via email at pbleblanc@seu.edu .

7. **Compensation:** After completion of the appropriate survey, your name will be recorded by the Office of Institutional Research. Once the approved time has passed for the accumulation of survey data, the list of names will be given to the researchers. From this list, a drawing will be conducted for one of two gift cards to a restaurant. The winners will be notified by email and will be given direction as to how to redeem the reward.

8. **Cost of Participation:** There are no costs associated with participation.

9. **Voluntariness:** Participation is voluntary and you may discontinue the experiment at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The decision to participate, decline, or withdraw from participation will have no effect on your grades at, status at, or future relations with Southeastern University.

10. **Dissemination:** Research will be reported in an Experimental Psychology class, at a science research symposium, in a thesis, and, possibly, in an undergraduate publication. The results will be in the form of a research paper, a presentation, and an undergraduate thesis.

- I am 18 years of age or older.
- I have read and understand the above consent form and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
- I was given a copy of this consent form for my records.

Participant Signature

Date

Print Name _____

Appendix B

Friendship Qualities Scale (FQS)

1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree
1. My friend and I spend all our free time together.	1	2	3	4 5
2. If I have a problem at school, at work, or at home, I can talk to my friend about it.	1	2	3	4 5
3. If other people were bothering me, my friend would help me.	1	2	3	4 5
4. My friend thinks of fun things for us to do together.	1	2	3	4 5
5. My friend helps me when I am having trouble with something.	1	2	3	4 5
6. If my friend had to move away, I would miss him or her.	1	2	3	4 5
7. When I do a good job at something, my friend is happy for me.	1	2	3	4 5
8. Sometimes, my friend does things for me, or makes me feel special.	1	2	3	4 5
9. Sometimes, I argue even violently with my friend.	1	2	3	4 5
10. My friend would stick up for me if someone were causing me trouble.	1	2	3	4 5
11. My friend can bug me or annoy me even though I ask him not to.	1	2	3	4 5
12. If I needed money, my friend would loan it to me.	1	2	3	4 5
13. After having fought, even violently, with my friend, if I said "sorry" to him or her, I think that he or she would continue to be angry with me.	1	2	3	4 5
14. Sometimes, my friend and I just sit around and talk about things like study, work, and things we like.	1	2	3	4 5
15. My friend would help me if I needed it.	1	2	3	4 5
16. If there is something bothering me, I can tell my friend about it even if it is something I cannot tell to other people.	1	2	3	4 5
17. If either my friend or I do something that bothers the other, we can make up easily.	1	2	3	4 5
18. My friend and I can argue a lot.	1	2	3	4 5
19. My friend and I disagree about many things.	1	2	3	4 5
20. If my friend and I have a violent argument, we can say "I'm sorry" and everything will be all right.	1	2	3	4 5
21. I feel happy when I am with my friend.	1	2	3	4 5
22. I think about my friend even when he or she is not around.	1	2	3	4 5

Appendix C

Romance Qualities Scale (RQS)							
1 Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	5 Strongly Agree			
1. My partner and I spend all our free time together.			1	2	3	4	5
2. If I have a problem at school, at work, or at home, I can talk to my partner about it.			1	2	3	4	5
3. If other people were bothering me, my partner would help me.			1	2	3	4	5
4. My partner thinks of fun things for us to do together.			1	2	3	4	5
5. My partner helps me when I am having trouble with something.			1	2	3	4	5
6. If my partner had to move away, I would miss him or her.			1	2	3	4	5
7. When I do a good job at something, my partner is happy for me.			1	2	3	4	5
8. Sometimes, my partner does things for me, or makes me feel special.			1	2	3	4	5
9. Sometimes, I argue even violently with my partner.			1	2	3	4	5
10. My partner would stick up for me if someone were causing me trouble.			1	2	3	4	5
11. My partner can bug me or annoy me even though I ask him not to.			1	2	3	4	5
12. If I needed money, my partner would loan it to me.			1	2	3	4	5
13. After having fought, even violently, with my partner, if I said “sorry” to him or her, I think that he or she would continue to be angry with me.			1	2	3	4	5
14. Sometimes, my partner and I just sit around and talk about things like study, work, and things we like.			1	2	3	4	5
15. My partner would help me if I needed it.			1	2	3	4	5
16. If there is something bothering me, I can tell my partner about it even if it is something I cannot tell to other people.			1	2	3	4	5
17. If either my partner or I do something that bothers the other, we can make up easily.			1	2	3	4	5
18. My partner and I can argue a lot.			1	2	3	4	5
19. My partner and I disagree about many things.			1	2	3	4	5
20. If my partner and I have a violent argument, we can say “I’m sorry” and everything will be all right.			1	2	3	4	5
21. I feel happy when I am with my partner.			1	2	3	4	5
22. I think about my partner even when he or she is not around.			1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

Cross, S. E., Bacon, P., & Morris, M. (2000). The relational- interdependent self-construal and relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78, 791-808.

Personal Attitudes Scale

Listed below are a number of statements about various attitudes and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions; we researchers are simply interested in how you think about yourself. In the space next to each statement, please write the number that indicates the extent to which you **agree or disagree** with each of these statements, using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

Please circle the number that best represents your response.

1. My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am.
2. When I feel very close to someone, it often feels to me like that person is an important part of who I am.
3. Overall, my close relationships have very little to do with how I feel about myself. (reversed)
4. I think one of the most important parts of who I am can be captured by looking at my close friends and understanding who they are.
5. When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends or family also.
6. When I establish a close friendship with someone, I usually develop a strong sense of identification with that person.
7. If a person hurts someone close to me, I feel hurt as well.
8. My close relationships are unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am. (reversed)
9. My sense of pride comes from knowing who I have as close friends.
10. In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image.
11. I usually feel a strong sense of pride when someone close to me has an important accomplishment.

Scoring:

Items are reversed as needed and averaged to create an index of Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal.

Appendix E

RISC Permission Emails

Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale

Tabitha L. Ingram

Actions

To: scross@iastate.edu

Sent Items

Tuesday, October 29, 2013 8:52 PM

Dr. Cross,

I am an undergraduate student in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, in the United States. I am planning on conducting an experiment comparing effects of friendship quality and romantic relationship quality, establishing the correlation between quality and self-construal. Specific classification of self-construal will be identified as either "weak" or "strong," depending on the number procured by the *Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale*.

I would like to ask for your permission to use the *Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale* for my research on relationship quality and self-construal. I believe this will be an appropriate measure for my study, evaluating the correlations between classification of self-construal and relationship quality.

Thank you for responding to this request for permission in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Ingram

Cross, Susan E [PSYCH] [scross@iastate.edu]

Inbox

Wednesday, October 30, 2013 4:15 PM

Yes, feel free to use the RISC.

Do you mind sending me any manuscripts you produce with this scale?

Best,
Susan Cross

Tabitha L. Ingram

Sent Items

Wednesday, October 30, 2013 6:01 PM

Thank you for your permission. Yes, I will send you the document of my findings once it is completed.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Ingram

Appendix F

FQS and RQS Permission Emails

Friendship Qualities Scale and the Romance Qualities Scale

Tabitha L. Ingram

Sent Items

Thursday, October 10, 2013 12:46 AM

Dr. Tani,

I am an undergraduate student in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, in the United States. I am planning on conducting an experiment comparing effects of friendship quality and romantic relationship quality, establishing the strength of the correlational relationship that romantic relationships have on well-being, accounting for the influence of friendship in general. The correlational data from romantic relationships will be evaluated in light of friendship, evaluating the strength of such measures of intimacy of romantic relationships on the quality of the relationship.

In my research, I have examined the article "A Measure for the Study of Friendship and Romantic Relationship Quality from Adolescence to Early-Adulthood," in which you were listed as the person to address correspondence.

I would like to ask for your permission to use the versatile *Friendship Qualities Scale* and *Romance Qualities Scale*, given that a substantial deal of reliability was discovered between the scales. I believe these will be appropriate measures for my study, evaluating the friendship constructs in both types of relationships.

I would use the English versions of the scale, as opposed to the Italian, but I believe the research will prove valuable to the field of psychology, especially in the manner of friendship and romantic relationship research in regards to relationship quality.

Thank you for responding to this request for permission in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

Tabitha Ingram

Dear colleague

I was absent from Florence in the last days and I only read now your message. Therefore I apologize for my delay in answer you.

I'll let you certainly to use the versatile Friendship Qualities Scale and Romance Qualities Scale. I am indeed very interested in the results of your study and I would be very glad to compare them with those I collected in Italy to check for possible cross-cultural differences.

Please keep me informed about them.

Best regards,

Franca Tani

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