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# Family approval as a constraint in dependency regulation: Evidence from Australia and Indonesia

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GEOFF MACDONALD<sup>a</sup> AND MARGARETA JESSICA<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*University of Queensland, Australia* and <sup>b</sup>*University of Indonesia, Indonesia*

## Abstract

Murray and colleagues' dependency regulation model suggests that individuals in romantic relationships permit themselves to be emotionally dependent on a romantic partner only when they are certain they are valued by their partners. We argue that in cultures where family has a role in mate selection, family approval of the relationship provides an additional constraint on emotional dependence. Reports of relationship perceptions were collected from Australian and Indonesian individuals in dating relationships. The traditional dependency regulation model was affirmed for the Australian sample, but regulation of emotional dependence was best accounted for by both feelings of security in a partner's affections and perceptions of approval from the partner's family for the Indonesian sample.

The experience of rejection is highly aversive, with recent literature reviews and experimental evidence suggesting that rejection can lead to feelings of pain similar to those experienced in conjunction with physical injury (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Such social pain is particularly likely in close relationships (Levitt, Silver, & Franco, 1996; Vangelisti & Maguire, 2002) because of the emotional vulnerability that is an essential part of the trust-building process (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). To explain how romantic partners regulate emotional dependence to avoid being hurt, Murray and colleagues developed the dependency regulation model (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001; Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998; Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Garrett Kusche, 2002). According to the model, individuals allow themselves to

become emotionally dependent on a romantic partner only when they feel secure in the viability of the relationship. In particular, the theory suggests that individuals will be willing to place value on a relationship to the extent that they feel they can rely on a partner's affections. However, this model in its current form does not account for the fact that, in many cultural systems, the family unit plays a large role in determining the viability of a romantic relationship. Thus, individuals' willingness to place value on a romantic relationship may be constrained not just by certainty in a partner's affections but also by perceptions of approval from the larger family unit. This potential oversight in the dependency regulation model may reflect the fact that the model has never been tested outside of North America. In the current study, we test the influence of perceptions of both partner and family approval on valuation of romantic relationships among dating individuals in Australia and Indonesia.

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Correspondence should be addressed to Geoff MacDonald, School of Psychology, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia, e-mail: geoff@psy.uq.edu.au.

## *Dependency regulation theory*

Self-esteem has proven to be a consistent predictor of negative outcomes in romantic relationships. Lower levels of self-esteem

have been related to more negative evaluations of a romantic partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b), lower reports of relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993; Murray et al., 1996b), and less stable relationships (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). In part to account for the relation between self-esteem and negative relationship outcomes, Murray and colleagues developed the dependency regulation model (Murray et al., 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002). According to the model, individuals in romantic relationships regulate emotional dependence in a self-protective fashion. One important element of emotional dependence is the value ascribed to specific relationships; the more one perceives a relationship as valuable, the more dependent one becomes on that relationship for satisfying needs and goals. However, valuing a relationship partner can be risky because increased value placed on a relationship means there is more to lose should the relationship end. Thus, Murray and colleagues suggest that individuals will refrain from placing too much value on a relationship until they have a sense of *felt security* or a firm belief that the relationship will not end. These researchers frame felt security as perceptions of positive regard from a partner (i.e., positive reflected appraisals) that promote feelings of safety from rejection. Thus, Murray and colleagues argue that lower self-esteem is related to negative relationship outcomes because individuals with lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to feel insecure in a partner's affections and consequently withdraw emotional investment from the relationship. These postulates are supported by the research literature.

The notion that lower levels of self-esteem are related to perceptions of less acceptance from others has been strongly supported by a review of the trait self-esteem literature (Leary & MacDonald, 2003). In fact, Sociometer Theory argues that self-esteem strongly reflects evolved mechanisms that provide an individual with a sense of her or his relational value to important others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). For example, in one study (MacDonald, Saltzman, & Leary, 2003), the lowest levels of trait self-esteem were reported by those who not only perceived themselves to hold a low

standing in particular domains (e.g., competence) but also believed that success in those domains was important for winning social approval. That is, low self-esteem appeared to result from the perception that individuals were failing to meet the expectations of others on inclusion-relevant dimensions. Consistent with the evolutionary interpretation, the link between self-esteem and feeling relationally valued by important others has been consistently supported in cross-cultural research (MacDonald, in press). For example, Abe (2004) demonstrated a strong, positive link between self-esteem and feeling supported by friends across both Japan and the United States.

In addition to believing that they do not possess attributes that others value (MacDonald et al., 2003), individuals low in self-esteem have been shown to hold conditional views of acceptance (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). This presents those low in self-esteem with a double dilemma when considering their prospects for acceptance from a romantic partner. These individuals are more likely to believe that they have numerous faults and that these faults will not be overlooked in interpersonal judgments. Those with high self-esteem, on the other hand, are less likely to perceive negative qualities in themselves and are more likely to believe the negative qualities they do have will be disregarded in others' judgments of their acceptability.

Not surprisingly, then, lower self-esteem has been consistently linked with feelings of insecurity in a romantic partner's affections (Murray et al., 2000, 2001, 2002). Consistent with the dependency regulation model, these feelings of insecurity in a partner's affections have been shown to fully mediate the relation between self-esteem and important indicators of value placed on a relationship such as satisfaction, partner evaluations, and trust (Murray et al., 2000, 2001). For example, Murray et al. (2000) demonstrated in a longitudinal study that, controlling for initial self-esteem reports, feeling less valued by a romantic partner predicted more negative perceptions of the partner up to 1 year later. Thus, the data suggest that an individual's degree of security in a partner's affections provides a constraint on willingness to place

value on a relationship. Those who feel less secure, and thus see rejection as a relatively likely outcome, appear to remain emotionally distant in order to protect themselves from the hurt they see as a realistic possibility. The more they minimize the value they place on the relationship, the less they have to lose if it ends. Those who feel more secure, and thus see rejection as less likely, appear to allow themselves to invest in the relationship through more positive evaluations of the partner and the relationship. Such investment may increase the risk of being hurt but should also facilitate positive emotional exchanges that promote satisfaction and stability.

#### *Family approval as a constraint on emotional dependence*

As noted, the dependency regulation model has been developed with exclusive reliance on North American data. However, in other cultural contexts, we may need to define felt security more broadly than perceptions of a partner's positive regard. In many cultures, mate selection is a decision made not just by the individual but also by the families of the partners. Thus, to the extent that felt security reflects a belief in the ongoing viability of a romantic relationship, individuals in some cultures may not feel safe in placing value on a romantic relationship unless they are confident not just of their partner's affections but also of the approval of the broader family network.

One of the most influential theoretical frameworks for understanding cultural differences is Markus and Kitayama's (1991) self-construal theory. The theory argues that people across cultures vary in their construal of the appropriate relationship between self and others, leading to variation in the degree to which they see themselves as separate from others (independent) and connected with others (interdependent). Often overlooked, however, is that these self-construals do not reflect opposite ends of a single continuum but are separate constructs (Markus & Kitayama; Tafarodi, Lang, & Smith, 1999). That is, both cultures and individuals within a culture can value (or not value) connection and autonomy

simultaneously. Individuals in Western cultures (e.g., North America) have been found to have relatively high independent (or individualist) self-construals and relatively low interdependent (or collectivist) self-construals (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Chua, 1988; Markus & Kitayama). These cultures have been characterized as placing more importance on internal thoughts, feelings, needs, and actions and less importance on incorporating the priorities of others into their sense of self. In particular, the relatively high level of independent self-construals in these cultures is related to an emphasis on one's unique self over the groups to which one belongs. On the other hand, individuals in Eastern cultures (e.g., East Asia) have been shown to have relatively high interdependent self-construals and relatively low independent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama). Individuals in these cultures are more likely to see themselves as connected with others, to base their self-concepts on interpersonal relationships, and to place importance on fitting in with others, maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships, and living up to social norms, roles, and obligations.

It is the high value placed on social harmony in interdependent cultures that sets the stage for relatively strong family influence on mate selection. Lee and Stone (1980) argue that mate selection systems across cultures may range from "autonomous," in which individuals select their own partners and decide whether they are going to continue or terminate their relationships, to "arranged," in which other members of the extended family, usually parents and family elders, have a say in determining whether a romantic relationship should be continued or terminated for their children. The importance of social obligation in collectivist societies facilitates arranged systems of mate selection. This pattern can be better understood by considering the principles of family formation across cultures (e.g., Ingoldsby, 1995). In the nuclear family system familiar to more independent cultures, each marriage is portrayed as a new family created. The couple themselves, not the members of the extended family, determine the future of the relationship to satisfy their own needs. In

extended family systems familiar to more interdependent cultures, marriage is not considered as the formation of a new family but as a means of recruiting new members to an existing family. As the decision of whether or not a new member should be recruited would affect the entire family, the decisions are based on satisfying the needs of the wider group.

In cultures where family has an important say in mate selection, then, a relationship can be broken not only by the choice of a partner but also by the choice of family members. At the general level, Dependency Regulation Theory argues that people should allow themselves to place value on a relationship when they are secure in winning the approval of valued others who have a stake in the relationship's future. Within more collectivist cultures, then, there may be two paths to felt security: perceptions of a partner's positive regard and perceptions of approval from the broader family network. Further, consistent with Sociometer Theory, higher levels of self-esteem should promote feelings of security in both domains. That is, if self-esteem reflects an evolved mechanism that provides a signal of relational value to important others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), then individuals higher in self-esteem should perceive themselves as more acceptable to their partners and the broader family network than those lower in self-esteem. In turn, belief in one's acceptability to these relational gatekeepers should promote security in the viability of the relationship, providing a sense of safety that encourages investment in the form of positive relationship evaluations. In statistical terms, in more collectivist cultures, the relation between self-esteem and valuation of a relationship should be mediated not just by reflected appraisals from the partner but also by confidence in the approval of the broader family network.

### *The current study*

In order to examine the influence of partner and family approval on valuation of romantic relationships across cultures, we compared evaluations of romantic relationships between two countries in which the dominant cultures represent relatively Western (Australia) and

Eastern (Indonesia) roots. We expected Australians to report less interdependence than Indonesians and thus to resemble North Americans in their perceptions of romantic relationships. Specifically, we expected lower levels of self-esteem to relate to less valuation of the relationship, and that this relation would be mediated by perceptions of a partner's positive regard. On the other hand, we expected our Indonesian sample to report more interdependence than the Australians, reflecting more concern with social and family obligations. Thus, we expected lower self-esteem to relate to less valuation of the relationships and that this relation would be mediated by perceptions of approval from both romantic partners and their families.<sup>1</sup>

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants were university students who were currently involved in dating relationships. Australian participants were recruited from the University of Queensland in Brisbane, and Indonesian participants were recruited from various universities in Indonesia. To qualify for participation, Australian participants were required to identify themselves as Anglo-Australian, and Indonesian participants were required to identify themselves as Indonesian. Australian participants were recruited via the University of Queensland 1st-year psychology participant pool. A total of 10 Australian participants were excluded because they did not identify as Anglo-Australian, leaving 78

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1. We have chosen to focus our predictions and analyses on approval of the relationship from partner's family rather than own family for two reasons. First, individuals are likely to have more ability to exert social influence on their own family's attitudes toward the relationship than the attitudes of their partners' families. Thus, approval from a partner's family should be more independent of one's own views of a relationship than approval from one's own family. Second, approval from one's own family can be important for several life domains, whereas approval from a partner's family has more exclusive importance for one's romantic relationship. Thus, we believe that concentrating on approval from a partner's family provides a stronger and more focused test of our hypotheses than investigation of approval from one's own family.

Australian participants (61 females and 17 males, mean age = 19.3 years, range = 17–35 years, mean relationship length = 15.9 months, range = 1 to 65 months).

The Indonesian sample consisted of students from four different universities—29 engineering students enrolled in a public state university, Institut Teknologi Bandung; 37 dentistry students enrolled in a private university, Universitas Professor Dr. Moestopo; 13 medical students enrolled in a private Catholic university, Universitas Atmajaya at Jakarta; and 20 students enrolled at the Universitas Atmajaya at Jogjakarta. A total of 125 questionnaires were distributed with 117 returned. Of these, 18 participants were excluded from the study because they were not currently involved in a dating relationship. A total of 99 Indonesian participants were retained (54 females and 45 males, mean age = 22.2 years, range = 17 to 27 years, mean relationship length = 28.0 months, range = 1 to 98 months).

### Materials

The questionnaires in our study offered even-numbered response options (e.g., 6-point Likert scales) to minimize effects of response set due to cultural differences. For example, Zax and Takahashi (1967) found that Japanese college students tended to select the midpoint on response scales and suggested this tendency may represent an expression of modesty. As modesty is also valued in Indonesian culture, we attempted to minimize this bias by using an even number of response points, thus eliminating the availability of a middle point.

**Demographics.** Each of the participants was asked to complete demographic questions including gender, age, nationality (Australian or Indonesian), whether they were involved in a current dating relationship, and the length of their current relationship.

**Self-construal scale (SCS).** The SCS (Singelis, 1994) is a 24-item scale designed to measure interdependent and independent self-construals. Participants indicate the extent to which each item is self-descriptive on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *totally disagree*

and 6 = *totally agree*. Twelve items assess interdependent construals (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$  Australia,  $.53$  Indonesia,  $.72$  overall) such as "My happiness depends on those around me," with 12 additional items assessing independent construals (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .79$  Australia,  $.73$  Indonesia,  $.74$  overall) such as "My personal identity independent of others, is very important to me." Higher scores represent more identification with the interdependent or independent self-construal.

**Rosenberg self-esteem scale.** The Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale consists of 10 items that assess the positivity of global self-evaluations (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$  Australia,  $.78$  Indonesia,  $.82$  overall). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with items such as "On the whole I am satisfied with myself" on an 8-point Likert scale with 1 = *totally disagree* and 8 = *totally agree*. Higher scores represent more positive self-evaluations.

**Reflected appraisals.** This measure (Murray et al., 1998) asks how positively participants believe they would be rated by their romantic partner on a series of 20 positive and negative interpersonal traits such as "kind and affectionate" and "emotional or moody" (reverse scored) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$  Australia,  $.64$  Indonesia,  $.75$  overall). Participants indicated the extent to which their partners would evaluate each item as descriptive of the participant on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not at all* and 6 = *completely*. Higher scores represent a belief that the partner would evaluate them positively.

**Partner evaluations.** For this measure (Murray et al., 1998), participants were asked to evaluate their partners on the same 20 traits as in the reflected appraisals measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$  Australia,  $.77$  Indonesia,  $.79$  overall). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which each item was descriptive of their partners on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not at all* and 6 = *completely*, with higher scores representing more favorable perceptions.

**Relationship satisfaction.** This 5-item scale (Murray et al., 2000) measured participants' level

of satisfaction with their current relationships with items such as "I am extremely happy with my current romantic relationship" (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$  Australia,  $.78$  Indonesia,  $.84$  overall). The ratings were made on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *extremely true*, with higher scores representing more satisfaction.

**Trust.** Participants rated their trust in their partners (e.g., "I can count on my partner to be concerned about my welfare") on an 8-item scale based on the items from Rempel, Holmes, and Zanna's (1985) trust scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$  Australia,  $.85$  Indonesia,  $.86$  overall). The ratings were given on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *not true at all* and 6 = *extremely true*, with higher scores representing more trust.

**Approval of partner's family.** This 1-item scale was designed by the current authors to measure the extent to which participants believed they had the approval of their partners' families. The item read, "I feel confident that my partner's family would accept me as her/his romantic partner." Ratings were given on a 6-point Likert scale with 1 = *totally disagree* and 6 = *totally agree*.

To translate these questionnaires from English to Indonesian, one native Indonesian-speaking PhD student enrolled in the psychology program at the University of Queensland translated the English version of the questionnaires into Indonesian. Then,

another doctoral-level bilingual psychologist back-translated the translation into English. Any disagreement regarding the translation was discussed among the translators and the second author of this paper.

### Procedure

Participants at the University of Queensland arrived at a lab in groups of up to 15 and were given an information sheet and a booklet of questionnaires in an envelope to maintain confidentiality. They were asked to read the information sheet and complete all the questionnaires. After the participants completed all the questions, they were asked to put the booklet back into the envelope, thanked, and debriefed. Participants in Indonesia were approached individually by a research assistant on the university grounds. When they agreed to participate, they were given the same information sheet and questionnaire booklet translated into Indonesian. They were also given the same verbal instructions as the participants at the University of Queensland. After completing all the questions, they were asked to put the questionnaire booklet into the envelope, thanked, and debriefed.

## Results

### Correlational analyses

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlations between the key variables for the Australian

**Table 1.** Zero-order correlation matrix

	INTSC	INDSC	SE	RA	PE	SAT	TRUST	FA
INTSC		.157	-.010	.265*	.126	.208 <sup>†</sup>	.188 <sup>†</sup>	.152
INDSC	.297**		.429***	.288*	-.106	-.002	.039	.161
SE	-.054	.153		.411***	.174	.178	.261*	.129
RA	.008	.120	.332**		.562***	.316**	.450***	.178
PE	.053	-.025	.095	.240*		.628***	.714***	.172
SAT	-.016	.157	.275**	.338**	.502***		.725***	.216 <sup>†</sup>
TRUST	.011	.068	.350***	.138	.558***	.670***		.168
FA	.183 <sup>†</sup>	.124	.278**	.131	.353***	.407***	.568***	

*Note.* Australian data presented above diagonal, Indonesian data presented below diagonal. INTSC = interdependent self-construals; INDSC = independent self-construals; SE = self-esteem; RA = reflected appraisals; PE = partner evaluations; SAT = relationship satisfaction; TRUST = trust; FA = family approval.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

and Indonesian samples. These analyses suggested a strong relationship between the outcome variables of partner evaluations, relationship satisfaction, and trust (all  $r$ s between .502 and .725). Thus, the mean scores for each of these variables were averaged to form a composite index of relationship value (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$  Australia, .79 Indonesia, .83 overall).

### Demographics

A series of  $t$  tests was conducted to examine differences in age of participants and length of relationships across cultures. A significant difference in age was found between Australians ( $M = 19.3$  years) and Indonesians ( $M = 22.2$  years),  $t(175) = 7.89, p < .001$ . A significant difference in length of relationship was also found between Australians ( $M = 15.9$  months) and Indonesians ( $M = 28.0$  months),  $t(175) = 3.61, p < .001$ . In order to account for these differences, age and length of relationship were controlled in all further analyses.

### Cultural comparisons

A series of  $t$  tests was conducted to examine mean differences across Australia and Indonesia (with variance from age and relationship length partialled out, see Table 2). As predicted, Indonesians ( $M = 4.41$ ) reported significantly higher interdependent self-construals than Australians ( $M = 4.03$ ),  $t(173) = 4.29, p < .001$ . No difference was found for independent self-construals.

### Mediational analyses

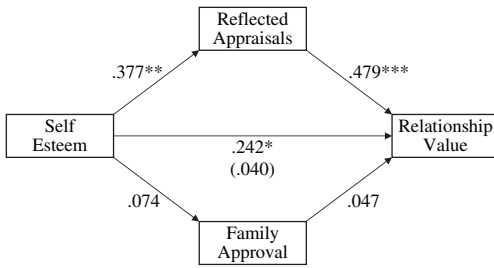
In order to test the mediating roles of reflected appraisals and family approval in the relation between self-esteem and relationship value, mediation analyses were conducted separately for the Australian and Indonesian samples. Four effects are necessary to support a mediational model (Baron & Kenny, 1986). First, self-esteem must significantly predict the mediator (e.g., reflected appraisals). Second, self-esteem must significantly predict the outcome (e.g., relationship value). Third, the mediator must significantly predict the outcome when controlling for self-esteem. Fourth, the relation between self-esteem and the outcome must be significantly reduced when controlling for the mediator. The Sobel (1982) procedure was used to test the significance of mediating variables, via the tool developed by Preacher and Leonardelli (2001). Again, we controlled for age and length of relationship in these analyses. Further, to be sure we were investigating the independent influence of each mediating variable, we controlled for family approval when testing the mediating role of reflected appraisals and vice versa.

In Australia, self-esteem significantly predicted relationship value,  $\beta = .242, p = .033$  (see Figure 1). Controlling for reflected appraisals, self-esteem was not significantly related to family approval,  $\beta = .074, p = .532$ . Thus, family approval could not mediate the relation between self-esteem and relationship value. Controlling for family approval, self-esteem significantly predicted reflected appraisals,  $\beta = .377, p = .001$ . Controlling for family approval and self-esteem, reflected

**Table 2.** Cross-cultural comparisons controlling for age and relationship length

Variable	Australia	Indonesia	$t$ value	$p$ value
Interdependence	4.03	4.41	4.29	< .001
Independence	4.14	4.17	1.06	.290
Self-esteem	4.70	4.41	3.32	.001
Reflected appraisals	4.52	4.29	3.32	.001
Relationship value	4.82	4.47	4.16	< .001
Family approval	5.05	4.76	1.79	.075

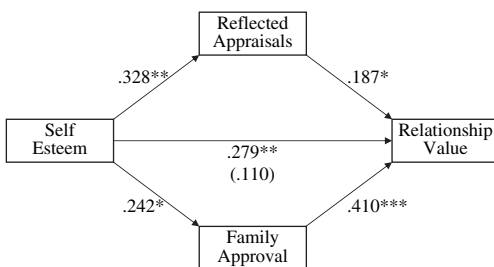
Note. Degrees of freedom = 173.



**Figure 1.** Mediation analyses for Australia. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

appraisals uniquely predicted relationship value,  $\beta = .479, p < .001$ . The Sobel test revealed a significant mediational effect,  $z = 2.72, p = .006$ . The relation between self-esteem and relationship value was reduced to nonsignificance,  $\beta = .040, p = .719$ , suggesting that reflected appraisals fully mediated the relation between self-esteem and relationship quality.

In Indonesia, self-esteem significantly predicted relationship value,  $\beta = .279, p = .004$  (see Figure 2). Controlling for reflected appraisals, self-esteem was significantly related to family approval,  $\beta = .242, p = .021$ . Controlling for reflected appraisals and self-esteem, family approval significantly predicted relationship value,  $\beta = .410, p < .001$ . The Sobel test revealed a significant mediational effect,  $z = 2.11, p = .035$ . Controlling for family approval, self-esteem significantly predicted reflected appraisals,  $\beta = .328, p = .002$ . Controlling for family approval and self-esteem, reflected appraisals uniquely predicted relationship value,  $\beta = .187, p = .034$ . The Sobel test revealed



**Figure 2.** Mediation analyses for Indonesia. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

a marginally significant mediational effect,  $z = 1.79, p = .074$ . The relation between self-esteem and relationship value was reduced to nonsignificance,  $\beta = .110, p = .228$ , suggesting that family approval and reflected appraisals fully mediated the relation between self-esteem and relationship value.<sup>2</sup>

**Discussion**

The results strongly support the proposition that in more collectivist cultures, family approval of a relationship may provide an important constraint on emotional dependence. In Australia, where interdependence was relatively low, the traditional dependency regulation model was supported. Australians with lower self-esteem reported less valuation of their romantic relationships (i.e., less satisfaction, more negative partner evaluations, and less trust), with this relation fully mediated by reflected appraisals. These data are consistent with past tests of the model, suggesting that willingness to become emotionally dependent on a partner was constrained by confidence in that partner’s positive regard. Perceptions of approval from the partner’s family were not related to either valuation of the relationship or self-esteem. In Indonesia,

2. In another set of analyses, we investigated whether perceptions of approval of the relationship from one’s own family (in place of approval from partner’s family) would mediate the link between self-esteem and relationship value (detailed analyses available on request). In Australia, own family’s approval was not significantly related to approval from the partner’s family,  $r(77) = .191, p = .094$ , and, controlling for reflected appraisals, did not significantly mediate the relation between self-esteem and relationship value,  $z = 1.60, p = .110$ . In Indonesia, own family’s approval was significantly related to approval from the partner’s family,  $r(98) = .461, p < .001$ , and controlling for reflected appraisals was a marginally significant mediator of the relation between self-esteem and relationship value,  $z = 1.86, p = .063$ . Thus, in Indonesia, approval from one’s own family was highly related to approval from a partner’s family and appeared to constrain valuation of the relationship in a similar fashion. This pattern of findings in Indonesia may reflect explicit agreements between families on the future of relationships, a tendency to select partners from highly similar family backgrounds, or more clear and consistent standards for winning approval for a relationship in Indonesian society. This issue appears to warrant further research attention.



where interdependence was relatively high, our proposed modification to the dependency regulation model was supported. Again, self-esteem was positively related to valuation of the relationship. However, this relation was mediated not just by perceptions of the partner's positive regard but also by perceptions of approval from the partner's family. Thus, there appeared to be two paths to felt security in Indonesia, with individuals' willingness to place value on the relationship constrained by a belief in the partner's affections and a belief in the family's approval. These data are consistent with the notion that both a partner and a partner's family are important stakeholders in the future of a romantic relationship in more collectivist cultures. As a result, approval from both these sources appears to influence the judgments of relationship viability that underpin emotional investment.

In addition to providing support for Dependency Regulation Theory, these results also support Sociometer Theory's contention that self-esteem reflects evolved indicators of relational value. Self-esteem was related to perceptions of approval from valued others across cultures, with social approach tendencies constrained by these perceptions. As in past research, we found self-esteem reports to be higher in the less collectivist context (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Heine et al. (1999) used such evidence as part of an argument against an evolved universal function of self-esteem. However, from a sociometer perspective, the important question is whether variation in levels of self-esteem relates to variation in feelings of acceptability to important others similarly across cultures (MacDonald, in press), as was demonstrated in our study.

#### *Strengths of the current study*

To our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the influence of perceptions of family approval on emotional investment in romantic relationships. This perspective on dependency regulation places emotional dependence in the larger context of the family network and suggests that considering the role of family may be particularly important for understanding

romantic relationships in collectivist societies. Indeed, as this study is the first to test the dependency regulation model in any country outside of Canada and the United States, the Australian data are important for supporting the generalizability of this theoretical framework across other Western countries. However, the Indonesian data provide the most unique insights. By considering romantic relationships from the Indonesian point of view, we have provided strong evidence that the concept of felt security needs to be expanded to better represent the experiences of individuals enmeshed in extended family systems. In particular, our results suggest that security may need to be sought not just from a relationship partner but from whatever actors are considered crucial to the viability of a relationship. In some situations, these actors may include family, close friends, employers (e.g., restrictions on employee dating), or even legal authorities (e.g., restrictions on same-sex couples).

#### *Limitations of the current study*

Although we believe our data provide a clear picture of the role of family approval in our two samples, there are some important limitations and qualifications to the findings. First, the generalizability of our results is open to question. Our sample consisted largely of young university-educated individuals in their first few years of a relationship. In North American samples, the dependency regulation model has been validated across both short-term dating and longer term marriage relationships (Murray et al., 2000, 2001), suggesting the mediational role of reflected appraisals may well generalize to longer relationships. However, it is possible that once a public commitment to a partner has been made in an interdependent culture, the individual is accepted as a member of the family and thus family approval no longer constrains closeness. Given the apparent lifelong importance of security in a partner's affections (even after the public commitment of marriage), our position on this issue is that it is likely that family approval is also a lifelong issue. However, this may be an area where gender plays an important role. To the extent that men are afforded higher status

than women in many cultures, men may perceive their positions in their new families to be more secure than women's positions.

One interesting aspect of our data is that although the two samples differed on interdependence, they did not differ on independence. Thus, it is also unclear how our Indonesian results would generalize to a more traditional Eastern sample where interdependence is high and independence is low. Our theoretical model suggests that, in this case, feelings of security in a partner's affections may not play a strong role in dependency regulation and family approval may be the most significant constraint. This would seem most likely under more purely arranged marriage systems in which the couple has little to no choice in the matter. Indeed, it is important to note that although we have framed the key cultural difference underpinning our results as interdependence, this variable is really a proxy for degree of autonomy in mate selection. Although we do not have a direct measure of this variable in our study, it seems important to include such a measure in future research.

There are also some statistical and procedural considerations. First, the reliabilities of some scales, especially interdependence and reflected appraisals, were somewhat low for our Indonesian sample. Our results strongly supported our hypotheses despite these low reliabilities, but future consideration may need to be given to how reflected appraisals in particular are construed in Indonesia and other collectivist cultures. Second, there were some differences in the data collection methods across the two samples. Specifically, Australian participants were part of a participant pool system and often completed questionnaires in groups, whereas Indonesian participants were approached individually as there was no participant pool to access. Although it is difficult to see how these differences could account for the pattern of results, they do represent a potential confound. Finally, our data contain the usual pitfalls of a correlational design. Although we present a model where reflected appraisals and family approval lead to regulation of the value placed on the relationship, we cannot rule out alternate causal explanations,

including third variables. Given that previous longitudinal tests of the dependency regulation model have been supportive, we think there is reason to favor the causal paths we suggest. However, this is another issue that requires further research attention. Indeed, we believe our results generally suggest the need for more consideration of romantic relationship dynamics in family-based mate selection systems.

#### *Future research directions*

Throughout this discussion, we have noted a number of suggestions for future research. These include consideration of other relational constraints (e.g., friends), investigation in other Eastern cultures, inclusion of measures of autonomy in mate selection, and longitudinal designs. There are also other interesting issues that arise from this research that may be worthy of future consideration. First, it may be important to consider the accuracy of individuals' perceptions of approval from a partner's family. Research has shown that individuals lower in self-esteem tend to underestimate the extent to which they are valued by a romantic partner, at least in Western cultures (Murray et al., 2000). As a result, those low in self-esteem miss an available source of affirmation that could help quell their insecurities and increase emotional investment. If those with lower self-esteem also underestimate their degree of approval from the partner's family, this may represent another important untapped source of reassurance. In turn, this research suggests that in collectivist cultures, family support may be particularly crucial in helping troubled relationships. Interventions in troubled relationships may be particularly effective if they involve reassurance from not just the partner but the partner's family. Further, if family opinion places constraints on the formation of marriage relationships in more collectivist societies, then such opinion should also constrain the ending of such relationships. In relationships that cannot end without family consent, stability may be better predicted by family opinion than by the feelings of those within the relationship. Thus, research investigating stability of relationships in collectivist

cultures may benefit strongly from indexing the views of the broader network of relationship gatekeepers.

### Conclusion

Overall, we believe our results suggest that consideration of the influence of a broader family network on perceptions of close relationships, especially in interdependent cultures, has the potential to lead to valuable insights. The results of the current study affirm the viability of the original dependency regulation model when individuals are uniquely responsible for choosing a romantic partner. However, when family opinion influences the viability of a relationship, such opinion should be considered an important potential constraint on emotional investment. Thus, understanding the constraints placed on romantic relationships by the need to satisfy both personal and collective needs has the potential to shed light on relationship dynamics within and across cultures.

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