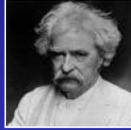# Our glories, our shames: Expanding the self in temporal self appraisal theory

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*"There's always something about your success that displeases even your best friends."* ~Mark Twain

## Upward Social Comparisons:

*Research by Tesser et al (1988) has confirmed Twain's cynicism: people are threatened by the successes of close others

*Recent research extends these findings: e.g. Gardner et al (2002) discovered that participants primed with interdependence were no longer threatened by a close other's success

*They theorize that "if the self expands to include close others, then their successes, even in self-relevant domains should boost esteem rather than threaten it."

*We believe that if the self expands to include close others, then *both their failures and their successes* should influence the self

## Temporal Self Comparisons:

*Ross & Wilson (2002) believe that people treat 'past selves' as comparison targets with their 'current selves'

*People try to maximize past successes by seeing these successes as happening recently and thus representative of their current self

*People also try to minimize past failures by seeing them as happening in the distant past and thus not representative of their current self

*Thus, a personal success feels closer in subjective time than a personal failure that occurred at about the same (real) time

## Current Study:

*We wondered what would happen if we studied people who included close others in their self-concepts (Aron et al, 1991)

*Would these people use the mechanism of psychological distancing to protect themselves from their partner's failures and/or boost themselves with their partner's successes?

## Method:

*We asked people in long-term romantic relationships to describe a proud (positive) or embarrassing (negative) incident that happened to their partner

*We then asked them how far away the incident felt to them (1=feels like yesterday, 10=feels very far away)

*We assessed overlap by conducting a median split on Aron et al.'s (1991) IOS scale. We controlled for actual time that events occurred.

## Results:

*Past research (Ross & Wilson, 2002) has found that successes feel closer away in psychological time than failures, but only if the event happened to the self (not an acquaintance)

*Despite this, we found an Overlap X Valence interaction, $F(1,38)=5.602$, $p=.023$

*Participants who were highly overlapped with their partners perceived their partner's failures as more distant than their partner's successes ($p=.049$)

*A non-significant trend in the opposite direction was found for low overlap participants ($p=.198$)

## Asymmetrical psychological distancing of partner events
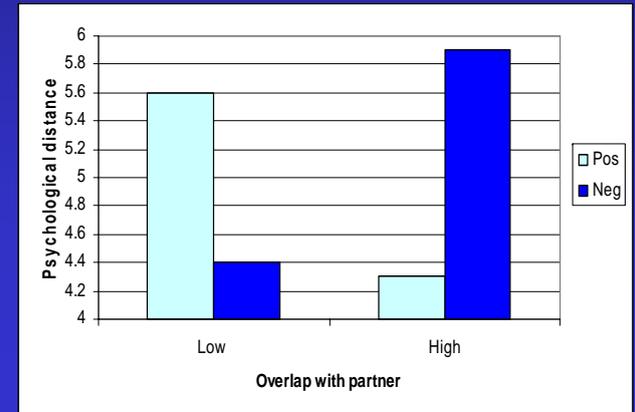


## Caveats & Conclusions:

*We have no direct evidence that high overlap participants felt personal threat: maybe they distanced the failures to protect their **partner** from failure--not to protect self

*As well, it is unclear whether the effects are being driven by the negative or the positive partner event. Participants may be distancing partner failures, bringing partner successes forward, or both.

*What we do know is that when the self expands to include close others, the self responds to the others' outcomes as they might respond to their own outcomes

*We are currently devising methods of randomly assigning levels of psychological overlap with others and will continue to study these effects

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