
Close Relationships and the Working Self-Concept: Implicit and Explicit Effects of Priming Attachment on Agency and Communion

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Two studies investigated how contextually activating attachment relationships influences the working self-concept in terms of agency and communion. In Study 1, 245 participants were primed with a secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent relationship and the implicit accessibility of agency and communion was assessed using word fragments. Activating a secure relationship increased the accessibility of communion, whereas activating an anxious-ambivalent relationship increased the accessibility of agency. In Study 2, 123 participants were primed with a secure, preoccupied, avoidant-dismissive, or avoidant-fearful relationship and explicit self-perceptions of agency and communion traits were assessed using the Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ). Gender interacted with the attachment prime, such that men primed with a secure relationship reported higher communion than did men primed with an avoidant (dismissive or fearful) relationship, whereas women primed with an anxious (preoccupied or fearful) relationship reported higher agency than did women primed with a secure relationship.

Keywords: *priming; attachment; agency; communion; working self-concept*

How do our close relationships influence the self? When we feel accepted by a significant other and secure in a close relationship do we see ourselves as more caring and more other-oriented? When we feel anxious about rejection by a significant other and unworthy of love and affection do we see ourselves as less caring and more self-oriented? The goal of this research was to investigate the influence of close relationships on the working self-concept, specifically, in terms of whether the contextual activation of attachment relationships influences the implicit activation and explicit self-perceptions of agency and communion.

Bakan (1966) coined the terms “agency” and “communion” to describe two basic modes of human existence. Agency reflects a concern for the self. It is associated with separating the self from others and with instrumental, traditionally masculine traits such as self-assertion, self-enhancement, and self-protection. Communion reflects a concern for others. It is associated with forming connections with others and with interpersonal, traditionally feminine traits such as cooperation, providing for others, and facilitating group harmony. In her seminal article, Helgeson (1994) theorized that differences in agency and communion are largely due to the socialization of men and women in American society; however, researchers also have explored the influence of situational factors in the expression of these orientations. Moskowitz, Suh, and Desaulniers (1994) found that situations reflecting role status were more important than gender in the expression of agency in work situations. Because agency and communion reflect two basic dimensions of interpersonal behavior—a self-orientation and an other-orientation—the quality of

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one's interpersonal relationships should play a role in their relative importance and expression.

Close Relationships and the Self

The notion that relationships play a vital role in the formation of the self-concept is, of course, not new to psychology (see Baldwin, 1992, for a review). As Baldwin noted, symbolic interactionists such as Cooley (1902) and Mead (1934) theorized that the self becomes known, and is defined, through social interactions. Psychodynamically oriented theorists, for example, Bowlby (1969), also stressed the importance of (internalized) relationships with significant others in the formation of personality. More recently, Andersen and Chen (2002) proposed a theory of relational selves that is based on Mischel and Shoda's (1995) cognitive-affective systems perspective. Their theory emphasizes the importance of person-situation interactions in understanding the self and also highlights the role of the working self-concept (see also Markus & Wurf, 1987)—that subset of knowledge about the self that is accessible at any one moment in time. According to their theory, the self is linked to significant other representations in memory, and these linkages reflect information about who the self is in relation to each significant other. When a specific significant other representation is activated, aspects of the self that are associated in memory with that person are subsequently activated. Consequently, when one is with a specific significant other, or when one is thinking about that person, the experience of the self is biased, reflecting who one is with that person. This momentary shift in the sense of self, these researchers claim, pervades all aspects of the self, including self-definitions, affect, motivation, goals, and behavior. Drawing on Andersen and Chen's theory, we explored whether the contextual activation of attachment relationships would influence the working self-concept with respect to the fundamental dimensions of agency and communion.

Attachment Theory and Agency and Communion

Adult attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, 1994; Simpson & Rholes, 1998) maintains that individuals develop mental models about close relationships during the course of repeated interactions with significant others. These mental models function like schemas, influencing interpersonal perceptions, expectations, and behaviors. Although over the years attachment models have been conceptualized in different ways (e.g., Hazan & Shaver's, 1987, three-category model and Bartholomew & Horowitz's, 1991, four-category model), current theory argues that differences in attachment should be organized around the two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Attachment anxiety is associated with a negative model

of self (the belief that the self is unworthy of love and affection) and a preoccupation with being abandoned by significant others, whereas attachment avoidance is associated with a negative model of others (the belief that others cannot be trusted) and a tendency to avoid closeness and dependency.

Indeed, chronic attachment has been found to be associated with differences in self-reported agency and communion. Collins and Read (1990) found their attachment anxiety dimension to be negatively associated with agency and their comfort with closeness and dependency dimensions to be positively associated with communion (see also Zuroff, Moskowitz, & Coté, 1999). Using their three-category model of attachment, Shaver et al. (1996) found anxious-ambivalent attachment to be negatively associated with agency, avoidant attachment to be negatively associated with communion, and attachment security to be positively associated with both agency and communion. Finally, in their study investigating attachment (assessed using Bartholomew & Horowitz's, 1991, measure) and unmitigated communion (i.e., communion without agency), Fritz and Helgeson (1998) found that whereas secure attachment was positively associated with communion, preoccupied and avoidant-fearful attachment (i.e., attachment anxiety) were positively associated with unmitigated communion. Thus, findings from several studies suggest that chronically avoidant individuals see themselves as less gentle, warm, and aware of other people's feelings, whereas chronically anxious individuals see themselves as less independent and self-confident and more inferior, spineless, and servile.

These studies are correlational, however, and consequently do not address how close relationships influence self-perceptions of agency and communion. Moreover, their focus on people's chronic or global attachment orientations neglects the importance of situational contingencies in understanding the self. The present research thus used an experimental methodology to investigate the effects of contextually activated attachment relationships. Whereas attachment models have traditionally been conceptualized as chronic traits, a number of researchers have recently explored the multiplicity of attachment models available to people. That is, although people may be guided by one global attachment orientation, research reveals that they actually have multiple attachment models available in memory (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Pierce & Lydon, 1998), they have different attachment models for different relationships (Pierce & Lydon, 2001), and their attachment model for a specific relationship can change over time (Kirkpatrick & Hazan, 1994). Given that people have multiple attachment models available in memory, experimental studies designed to test causal

predictions about the effects of attachment are becoming more common (see Mikulincer, Gillath, et al., 2001, for a discussion). Several studies have investigated the effects of contextually activating or priming attachment (Baldwin et al., 1996; Mikulincer & Arad, 1999; Mikulincer, Gillath, et al., 2001; Mikulincer, Hirschberger, Nachmias, & Gillath, 2001; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001; Pierce & Lydon, 1998) and support the notion that the contextual activation of attachment can have dramatic effects, independent of people's chronic attachment orientations, on interpersonal perceptions, expectations, and behaviors.

The Present Investigation

Does bringing to mind a specific attachment relationship influence the working self-concept in terms of the fundamental dimensions of agency and communion? To investigate this question, the present research looked at the effects of contextually activating different attachment relationships on self-perceptions of agency and communion as well as on the implicit activation of agency and communion. Whereas agency and communion are typically assessed with self-report measures, we drew on classic work in motivation (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989) and extensive theory and research in social cognition (Brauer, Wasel, & Niedenthal, 2000; Devine, 1989; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wegner & Bargh, 1998) on the distinction between implicit and explicit assessments of psychological constructs. Whereas explicit measures are theorized to assess conscious, deliberate judgments that guide controlled behaviors, implicit measures are thought to assess underlying motives and attitudes that are less influenced by self-presentational concerns, operate more automatically, and guide spontaneous behaviors.

Implicit measures have been used extensively in research on stereotyping and prejudice (for a review, see Brauer et al., 2000), as these constructs are particularly susceptible to social desirability concerns; however, implicit measures are becoming increasingly popular in a wide range of areas in social psychological research. They have been used to assess implicit self-esteem (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), as well as mortality concerns, which typically operate outside of conscious awareness (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994). They also have been used to assess cognitive and affective reactions to interpersonal rejection (Ayduk, Mischel, & Downey, 2002) and, particularly germane to the present research, they have been used to investigate the influence of significant others on how goals are construed and experienced (Shah, 2003b) and on nonconscious goal pursuits (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003a). Because they circumvent self-presentation concerns and other defensive processes, as

well as simple lack of awareness, implicit measures are able to tap associations that are automatically activated on contact with a particular category, whether it is a stereotyped group member, the self, or a significant other. With respect to the present research, Study 1 used a word-fragments completion task, a standard measure of implicit accessibility (Brauer et al., 2000; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991), to investigate the more automatic, nonconscious effects of activating attachment relationships on agency and communion. It was theorized that heightened accessibility of agency or communion would reflect an underlying goal-state toward the self or other, respectively. Study 2 used the Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Holahan, 1979) to investigate the more controlled effects of activating attachment relationships on self-perceptions of agency and communion traits.

Predictions Regarding the Influence of Attachment on Agency and Communion

Secure relationships are characterized by a positive model of self and other. Secure individuals feel worthy of affection and feel others are trustworthy and reliable. Thus, in line with research investigating chronic attachment, we predicted that bringing to mind a secure relationship should activate communal goals and increase self-perceptions of communal traits. Thinking about a relationship in which one feels loved and accepted should activate an other orientation and set in motion goals associated with close relationships, such as cooperation, providing for others, and caring for others (communal goals), and also should bias self-perceptions toward how one is in a secure relationship, for example, as cooperative and caring.

Avoidant (dismissive and fearful) relationships are associated with a negative model of other (i.e., a dislike or fear of closeness and dependency) and a deactivation of the attachment system (Fraley & Shaver, 1997). Because avoidant attachment affects the model of other, and because communion reflects an other-orientation, we predicted that activating an avoidant relationship should primarily influence communion. Specifically, activating an avoidant relationship should deactivate the attachment system and, consequently, decrease the accessibility of communal goals, which reflect relationship motives. We also predicted that, consistent with research investigating chronic attachment, activating an avoidant relationship should decrease self-perceptions of communal traits, such as being kind, warm, understanding, and devoted, as those traits are inconsistent with how the self is in an avoidant relationship.

Anxious (preoccupied and fearful) relationships are associated with a negative model of self and with concerns about rejection and abandonment. Because

attachment anxiety primarily affects the model of self, and because agency concerns the self, we predicted that activating an anxious attachment relationship should primarily influence agency. Thinking about a relationship in which one feels insecure about the acceptance of another should threaten one's sense of self-worth and, consequently, should activate a self-orientation and trigger goals associated with the self and with self-protection (agency goals). With respect to self-perceptions of agency, we had two competing hypotheses. Based on studies investigating chronic attachment, one might predict a negative association between attachment anxiety and agency: Thinking about a relationship in which one feels insecure about acceptance may activate images of the self as subservient, inferior, and dependent (low in agency). On the other hand, because anxious relationships can be threatening to the self, activating an anxious relationship may create a host of effects different from those found in research investigating chronic attachment: Individuals may respond in a self-protective manner and assert agency in an effort to enhance their self-image and reduce their dependency on a significant other who may abandon them.

Rationale for this second hypothesis is supported by Andersen and Chen (2002), who argue that when shifts in the working self-concept pose a threat to the self, compensatory self-enhancement should occur. When negative self-attributes associated with a specific relationship (being unlovable and worthless) make their way into the working self-concept, people should emphasize positive aspects of the self as a protective response. Of importance, these researchers maintain that because relationships are so vital, when the need for connection is blocked (as it would be in a relationship characterized by attachment anxiety), people will protect the self in paradoxical ways, such as by emphasizing competencies and accomplishments—in short, by emphasizing self-oriented, agency traits. Therefore, with respect to the anxious prime, we explored two competing hypotheses: (a) priming an anxious relationship would have the same effect as chronic attachment, resulting in decreased self-reported agency, or (b) priming an anxious relationship would elicit a self-protective motive and increase self-reported agency.

In addition to these main hypotheses, we predicted that gender may interact with the attachment prime on the explicit measures but not on the implicit measures. According to Cross and Madson (1997), research suggests that men in North America tend to have an independent self-construal, whereas women tend to have an interdependent self-construal. For men, self-definition is based on uniqueness and distinguishing themselves from others (i.e., agency), whereas for women, self-definition is based on relationships and unions with oth-

ers (i.e., communion). Thus, because agency is more central to men's self-concept, their explicit sense of how agentic they are (i.e., their endorsement of agency traits) may be more stable and less likely to fluctuate from one relationship to the next, and consequently may be less affected by the activation of a specific relationship. By comparison, because agency is less central to women's self-concept, their explicit sense of how agentic they are may be less stable and more likely to fluctuate from one relationship to the next, and consequently may be more affected by the activation of a specific relationship. In the same way, because communion is more central to women's identity and less central to men's identity, the attachment prime may have a stronger effect on men's self-reported communion than on women's self-reported communion. Thus, we predicted that gender may interact with the attachment prime to influence participants' explicit perceptions of agency and communion traits but that it would not interact with the prime to influence the implicit accessibility of agency and communion goals.

Finally, in Study 2, to prime attachment, we replaced Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three-category model with Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category model to explore the effects of different combinations of anxiety and avoidance. Bartholomew and Horowitz's model makes the distinction between avoidant-dismissive and avoidant-fearful types. Although both are characterized by high avoidance, they differ in their level of anxiety: Avoidant-dismissive attachment is marked by low anxiety, whereas avoidant-fearful attachment is marked by high anxiety. Because of their high anxiety, avoidant-fearful relationships may influence different self-perceptions of agency than avoidant-dismissive relationships, and using the three-category model does not detect that difference.

In summary, then, first we predicted that priming secure relationships should increase the accessibility of communion on the word-fragments task compared to priming avoidant and anxious-ambivalent relationships and should increase self-reported communal traits for men on the EPAQ. Second, we predicted that priming avoidant relationships should decrease the accessibility of communion on the word-fragments task compared to priming secure relationships and should decrease self-reported communal traits for men on the EPAQ. Third, we predicted that priming anxious relationships should increase the accessibility of agency on the word-fragments task compared to priming secure and avoidant relationships and should result in either decreased self-reported agency or increased self-reported agency compared to priming secure relationships for women on the EPAQ.

STUDY 1

The goal of Study 1 was to investigate the effects of priming attachment on the implicit accessibility of agency and communion goals.

*Method**PARTICIPANTS*

Two hundred ninety-three participants age 16 to 30 were recruited on a volunteer basis to complete a relationship survey. Because the dependent variable involved solving word fragments, native English speakers were targeted. Participants were randomly assigned to the secure, avoidant, or anxious-ambivalent relationship prime condition. Similar to Baldwin et al.'s (1996, Study 3) findings, 48 participants in our study were unable to nominate someone with whom they had an attachment relationship similar to the one requested. Consequently, 15, 13, and 20 participants were dropped from the secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent attachment conditions, respectively. Thus, the final sample consisted of 245 participants (109 men, 136 women; M age = 22.01). There were 90, 79, and 76 participants in the secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent conditions, respectively.

PROCEDURE

Prospective participants were asked if they would be interested in completing a relationship survey. They were informed that it would take approximately 25 min of their time and that it was important to complete the survey alone and in a quiet place. Agreeing participants were then given the survey and an envelope and were instructed to return the survey in the sealed envelope to ensure anonymity. Surveyors were unaware of the hypotheses when administering the survey and participants were debriefed upon returning the survey.

The survey began with a brief introduction in which participants were informed that one of the things the researchers were interested in was people's ability to visualize their significant others. To this end, they were told that they would be given a description of a relationship and then would be asked to think about someone with whom they have had that kind of relationship. Participants also were told that they would be answering some other questions about their relationship. Demographics were assessed and then participants began the relationship visualization section in which an adaptation of the procedure developed by Baldwin et al. (1996) was used to contextually activate an attachment relationship. Specifically, participants were given a description of one of Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three attachment relationships modified to reflect a relationship with a specific person (see Experimental Manipulation below). Participants were told to think about a relationship they have

had that fit the description and to picture in their mind the person with whom they had that relationship. It was emphasized that the nominated relationship be important and meaningful to the participant. After reading the relationship description, participants were given the following instructions:

Now, take a moment and try to get a visual image in your mind of this person. What does this person look like? What is it like being with this person? You may want to remember a time you were actually with this person. What would he or she say to you? What would you say in return? How do you feel when you are with this person? How would you feel if they were here with you now?

After the visualization, participants were asked to write a sentence or two about their thoughts and feelings regarding themselves in relation to their chosen person.

Participants then completed a word game to "clear their mind" from the previous section, which consisted of a list of word fragments to solve (see word-fragments completion task below). After the word game, participants answered some questions about their goals. Finally, participants were asked (a) whether they were able to think of someone with whom they had the kind of relationship like the one requested, (b) how important the relationship was to them, (c) how satisfied they were with the relationship, and (d) how long they had known the person. Chronic attachment style was assessed at the end of the survey using a shortened version of the Experience in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998).

MEASURES

Word-fragments completion task. The word-fragments completion task is a standard implicit measure designed to detect the heightened activation of particular constructs. When completing word fragments, participants are generally unaware of what, if anything, is being assessed; thus, their controlled processing efforts can be averted. Participants were given 23 word fragments to complete, 13 of which could be completed with words taken from the EPAQ. Six word fragments could be completed with agency words and 6 word fragments could be completed with communion words (three positive and three negative words were chosen from each dimension); 1 word fragment could be completed with either an agency or communion word. When possible, the word fragments were created so that there was an alternate completion that was either as common as or more common in the English language than was the target completion to control for completions based solely on frequency of occurrence. The word fragments and their possible solutions may be found in the appendix.

ECR (Brennan et al., 1998). This 36-item questionnaire is designed to assess the two underlying dimensions of attachment avoidance and anxiety. Avoidant items reflect comfort with closeness and dependency and anxious items reflect anxiety about being abandoned. Participants were instructed to indicate on a 7-point scale the extent to which they agree/disagree with each item in terms of how they generally experience close relationships. A shortened version of this questionnaire was used in the present study. Specifically, Brennan et al. report the results of a factor analysis conducted on the ECR. The 3 items that had the highest factor loadings on the anxiety dimension and the 2 items that had the highest factor loadings on the avoidant dimension were selected. Because the 2 avoidant items reflected discomfort with closeness, we also selected the 2 items with the highest factor loadings reflecting fear of dependency. We assessed the validity of the 7-item version of the ECR using a separate sample of 182 participants. Analyses revealed that our 3-item measure of anxiety was highly correlated with the ECR's anxiety measure, $r(180) = .83$, $p < .001$, and that our 4-item measure of avoidance was highly correlated with the ECR's avoidance measure, $r(180) = .82$, $p < .001$.

EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION

Secure attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have found that it was relatively easy to get close to the other person and you felt comfortable depending on the other person. In this relationship you didn't often worry about being abandoned by the other person and you didn't worry about the other person getting too close to you.

Avoidant attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have found that you were somewhat uncomfortable being too close to the other person. In this relationship you found it was difficult to trust the other person completely and it was difficult to allow yourself to depend on the other person. In this relationship you felt yourself getting nervous when the other person tried to get too close to you and you felt that the other person wanted to be more intimate that you felt comfortable being.

Anxious-ambivalent attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have felt like the other person was reluctant to get as close as you would have liked. In this relationship you worried that the other person didn't really like you, or love you, and you worried that they wouldn't want to stay with you. In this relationship you wanted to get very close to the other person but you worried that this would scare the other person away.

Results and Discussion

The word-fragment completions were coded as either a "hit" or a "miss" for the target word, and the accessibility of agency and communion was determined by summing the hits in each category. That is, agency accessibility was computed by summing the hits to the target words *superior*, *confident*, *active*, *competitive*, *boast*, *greedy*, and *hostile*. Communion accessibility was computed by summing the hits to target words *kind*, *warm*, *gentle*, *cooperative*, *whiny*, *nag*, and *dependent*.

To test the hypotheses, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted on the accessibility of agency and communion with attachment prime (secure, avoidant, anxious-ambivalent) as the between-subjects factor. Planned contrasts and focused comparisons were then conducted to test predictions related to specific groups. Because gender differences are sometimes found on self-reported agency and communion, the effects of gender on the accessibility of agency and communion also were investigated. Gender did not predict the accessibility of agency or communion, both $F_s < 1$, *ns*, and did not interact with the attachment prime to influence the accessibility of agency or communion, both $F_s < 2$, *ns*.

COMMUNION ANALYSES

The one-way ANOVA investigating communion revealed a main effect for attachment prime, $F(2, 242) = 3.75$, $p < .05$. Planned contrasts revealed that communal words were more accessible to those primed with a secure relationship than to those primed with an anxious-ambivalent or an avoidant relationship, $t(242) = 2.68$, $p < .01$. Moreover, focused comparisons revealed that communion was more accessible to individuals primed with a secure relationship, $M(90) = 2.28$, than to individuals primed with either an anxious-ambivalent, $M(76) = 1.82$, $t(242) = 2.57$, $p < .05$, or an avoidant relationship, $M(79) = 1.92$, $t(242) = 2.03$, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). The accessibility of communion did not differ between the anxious-ambivalent and avoidant prime groups, $t < 1$, *ns*.

AGENCY ANALYSES

The one-way ANOVA investigating agency revealed a main effect for attachment prime, $F(2, 242) = 4.06$, $p < .05$. Planned contrasts revealed that agency was more accessible to those primed with an anxious-ambivalent relationship than to those primed with a secure or an avoidant relationship, $t(242) = 2.85$, $p = .005$. Focused comparisons revealed that agency was more accessible to individuals primed with an anxious-ambivalent relationship, $M(76) = 2.63$, than to individuals primed with either a secure relationship, $M(90) = 2.17$, $t(242) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, or an avoidant relationship, $M(79) = 2.15$, $t(242) =$

TABLE 1: Mean Agency and Communion Hits as a Function of Attachment Prime (Study 1)

	Attachment Prime		
	Secure	Avoidant	Anxious-Ambivalent
Communion			
<i>M</i>	2.28 _a	1.92 _b	1.82 _b
<i>SD</i>	1.26	1.16	1.00
Agency			
<i>M</i>	2.17 _a	2.15 _a	2.63 _b
<i>SD</i>	1.07	1.35	1.18

NOTE: Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

2.49, $p < .05$ (see Table 1). The accessibility of agency did not differ between the secure and avoidant prime groups, $t < .5$, *ns*.

As predicted, contextually activating attachment relationships did influence the accessibility of agency and communion. Thinking about a relationship in which one feels accepted and secure activated communal words, such as *kind*, *warm*, and *cooperative*, whereas thinking about an attachment relationship in which one feels insecure, whether it is characterized by anxious-ambivalence or avoidance, appeared to inhibit the activation of communal words. On the other hand, thinking about a relationship in which one worries about acceptance and feels unworthy of love and affection activated agency words, such as *superior*, *competitive*, and *hostile* to a greater extent than did thinking about either a secure or an avoidant relationship.

STUDY 2

Study 2 investigated the effects of priming attachment on explicit self-perceptions of agency and communion traits. In Study 2, Hazan and Shaver's (1987) three-category model was replaced by Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) four-category model to prime attachment in an effort to delineate the effects of anxiety and avoidance.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

One hundred thirty-two students were recruited to participate in a laboratory study investigating goals. One participant was dropped because she was significantly older than the other participants (i.e., 44 years old). A second participant was dropped because his responses to the EPAQ were not recorded. Similar to Study 1, 7 participants were dropped because they were unable to nominate someone with whom they have had an attachment relationship similar to the one requested (2, 2, 1, and 2 participants assigned to the secure, preoccupied,

avoidant-dismissive, and avoidant-fearful conditions, respectively). Thus, the final sample consisted of 123 participants (55 men, 68 women; *M* age = 19.9). Participants received either extra credit toward their grade in a psychology course or \$8 (Canadian) for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) attachment conditions. There were 31 participants in the secure condition and 32, 32, and 28 participants in the preoccupied, avoidant-dismissive, and avoidant-fearful conditions, respectively.

PROCEDURE

Upon arrival, participants were asked if, in addition to the goals study, they would be willing to help the experimenter pilot test the effectiveness of a guided visualization procedure to be used in an unrelated study the next semester. Participants were then escorted into a private room where a consent form, the guided visualization instructions, and a tape recorder and headphones were located. The guided visualization instructions provided participants with a description of one of Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) attachment relationships modified to reflect a relationship with a specific person (see Experimental Manipulation below). On the written instructions sheet, participants were asked to think about a meaningful relationship that fit the description provided and then to picture in their mind the person with whom they had that relationship. They were then instructed to put on the headphones and turn on the tape recorder. The tape-recorded guided visualization was based on the procedure used by Baldwin et al. (1996) and was similar to that used in Study 1.

To support the cover story, when participants had completed the guided visualization, they answered questions assessing how difficult they found the visualization to be, whether they were able to think of someone, and how vivid the image was of this person. When they completed the questionnaire, participants alerted the experimenter, who was waiting in the adjacent room. At this point, the experimenter returned with a new consent form and a demographics questionnaire. For the second study, all questionnaires were presented on a computer monitor and included the EPAQ and ECR. When participants had completed the second study, they were probed for suspicions and debriefed.

MEASURES

EPAQ (Spence et al., 1979). The EPAQ is a 32-item¹ questionnaire consisting of four subscales measuring (a) positive (i.e., socially desirable) agency traits (e.g., independent, competitive, and active), (b) positive communion traits (e.g., gentle, warm in relations with others, and able to devote the self completely to others), (c) negative (i.e., socially undesirable) agency traits (e.g.,

dictatorial, hostile in relations with others, and likely to look out only for him/herself), and (d) negative communion traits. The negative communion scale assesses both unmitigated communion (e.g., spineless, servile, and subordinates self to others) and verbal passive aggressiveness (e.g., whiny, complaining, and nagging). Participants were presented with a pair of contradictory characteristics (e.g., “very rough” and “very gentle”) with the letters *A* through *E* between them and were asked to indicate where they fall between the two extremes. As noted, the EPAQ was administered on a computer. Because of the computer time-out procedure, when participants did not respond in the time allotted, no answer was recorded. The mean number of items missed by participants was 1.13, and the median and mode were 1 on the 32-item EPAQ measure. To address this issue, means were taken to assess participants’ agency and communion scores.

ECR (Brennan et al., 1998). The same shortened 7-item version of this questionnaire used in Study 1 was used to assess participants’ chronic attachment style.

EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATION

Secure attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have found that it was easy to be emotionally close to the other person. In this relationship, you felt comfortable depending on the other person and having them depend on you. In this relationship you didn’t particularly worry about being alone or about the other person not accepting you.

Preoccupied attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you have felt like you wanted to be completely emotionally intimate with the other person but felt that the other person was reluctant to get as emotionally close as you would have liked. In this relationship you felt uncomfortable being alone and worried that the other person didn’t value you as much as you valued them.

Avoidant-dismissive attachment prime. Please think about a relationship you have had in which you felt comfortable not being emotionally close to the other person. In this relationship you felt that it was very important to be independent and self-sufficient and you preferred not to depend on the other person or have the other person depend on you.

Avoidant-fearful attachment prime. Please think about a relationship that you have had in which you felt uncomfortable getting emotionally close to the other person. In this relationship you wanted to be emotionally close but felt that it was difficult to trust the other person completely, or to depend upon them. In this relationship you worried that you would be hurt if you allowed yourself to become too emotionally close to the other person.

Results and Discussion

To test the hypotheses, a 2 (gender: male vs. female) × 2 (attachment prime: secure vs. insecure) × 2 (agency vs. communion) repeated-measures analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed, controlling for participants’ chronic attachment style.² The between-subjects factors were gender and the attachment prime, and the within-subjects factor was agency and communion. These analyses were supplemented with analyses treating attachment as a four-level variable (secure, preoccupied, avoidant-dismissive, and avoidant-fearful).

The repeated-measures ANCOVA investigating agency and communion revealed a significant Gender × Agency-Communion interaction, $F(1, 117) = 10.60, p = .001$. Focused comparisons showed that men described themselves as higher in agency, $M(55) = 3.16$, than did women, $M(68) = 2.90, t(117) = 3.88, p < .001$. No gender differences were found on communion, $t < 1.5, ns$. There was also a significant Attachment Prime × Agency-Communion interaction, $F(1, 117) = 7.14, p < .01$. Focused tests revealed that individuals primed with an insecure relationship described themselves as higher in agency, $M(92) = 3.12$, than did those primed with a secure relationship, $M(31) = 2.95, t(117) = 2.27, p < .05$.

Although the interaction between gender, attachment prime, and agency-communion was not significant, $F < 1$, careful inspection of the data revealed gender differences. As shown in Table 2, women primed with an insecure relationship described themselves as higher in agency, $M(50) = 3.06$, than did women primed with a secure relationship, $M(18) = 2.75, t(117) = 3.03, p < .01$. On the other hand, the attachment prime did not influence women’s self-reported communion, $t < 1$. Focusing on the individual attachment relationships, the boost in agency appeared to be due to the anxious primes in particular (i.e., preoccupied and avoidant-fearful). Women primed with a preoccupied relationship described themselves as higher in agency, $M(17) = 3.00$, than did women primed with a secure relationship, $t(113) = 2.04, p < .05$, and women primed with an avoidant-fearful relationship also described themselves as higher in agency, $M(21) = 3.13$, than did women primed with a secure relationship, $t(113) = 3.20, p < .01$. Avoidant-dismissive, relationship-primed women described themselves as only slightly higher in agency, $M(12) = 3.00$, than did secure primed women, $t(113) = 1.82, p < .10$. In summary, as predicted, for women, activating attachment relationships primarily influenced self-reported agency. Women who thought of an insecure attachment relationship, and especially one characterized by anxiety and the fear of abandonment, increased self-reported agency. That is, they described themselves as more competitive, independent, superior, dictatorial, and hostile in relations

TABLE 2: Women's Mean Agency and Communion Scores as a Function of Attachment Prime (Study 2)

	<i>Attachment Prime</i>			
	<i>Secure</i>	<i>Avoidant-Dismissive</i>	<i>Preoccupied</i>	<i>Avoidant-Fearful</i>
Agency				
<i>M</i>	2.75 _a	3.00 _{a,b}	3.00 _b	3.13 _b
<i>SE</i>	.10	.12	.10	.09
Communion				
<i>M</i>	3.36 _a	3.52 _a	3.38 _a	3.36 _a
<i>SE</i>	.08	.10	.08	.07

NOTE: Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

with others than did women who thought of a secure relationship.

The focused comparisons also revealed differences for men. In comparison to women, however, for men the differences were evidenced on the communal traits. As shown in Table 3, men primed with a secure relationship described themselves as more communal, $M(13) = 3.43$, than did men primed with an insecure relationship, $M(42) = 3.14$, $t(117) = 2.45$, $p < .05$. The attachment prime did not influence men's self-reported agency, $t < 1$. Focusing on the individual attachment relationships, the decrease in communion appeared to be due to the avoidant primes. Men primed with an avoidant-dismissive relationship described themselves as less communal, $M(20) = 3.10$, than did men primed with a secure relationship, $t(113) = 2.50$, $p < .05$, and men primed with an avoidant-fearful relationship also described themselves as less communal, $M(7) = 3.08$, than did men primed with a secure relationship, $t(113) = 2.02$, $p < .05$. There were no differences found between men primed with a secure and men primed with a preoccupied relationship, $t < 1$, *ns*. In contrast to the women, for men, activating attachment relationships primarily influenced self-reported communion. Specifically, men who thought of an insecure relationship, especially one characterized by avoidance, subsequently described themselves as less communal, that is, as less gentle, warm, emotional, gullible, and servile, than did men who thought of a secure attachment relationship.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings from these studies support the notion that close relationships play an important, causal role in the working self-concept. Our first prediction was that contextually activating a secure relationship should increase the accessibility of communal goals and increase explicit self-perceptions of communal traits. Attachment security is associated with feeling accepted and secure about the self in relation to a significant

TABLE 3: Men's Mean Agency and Communion Scores as a Function of Attachment Prime (Study 2)

	<i>Attachment Prime</i>			
	<i>Secure</i>	<i>Avoidant-Dismissive</i>	<i>Preoccupied</i>	<i>Avoidant-Fearful</i>
Agency				
<i>M</i>	3.14 _a	3.29 _a	3.14 _a	3.00 _a
<i>SE</i>	.11	.09	.11	.16
Communion				
<i>M</i>	3.43 _a	3.10 _b	3.22 _{a,b}	3.08 _b
<i>SE</i>	.09	.07	.09	.13

NOTE: Within rows, means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

other, and communion reflects a focus on others and a concern with relationships. In Study 1, thinking of a secure relationship activated an other-orientation and communal goals, such as kindness, warmth, and cooperation. In Study 2, thinking of a secure relationship biased self-perceptions of communal traits for men, such that men perceived themselves as more warm, kind, understanding, and helpful as well as more gullible and servile when they thought of themselves in a secure relationship. As predicted, gender did not influence the implicit activation of communion goals in Study 1 but it did interact with the attachment manipulation in Study 2, suggesting that men's self-perceptions of communal traits may be less central and more relationship specific compared to women's self-perceptions of communal traits.

Our second prediction was that contextually activating an avoidant relationship should decrease the accessibility of communal goals and decrease self-perceptions of communal traits. In Study 1, thinking about an avoidant relationship appeared to inhibit the accessibility of communal goals relative to thinking about a secure relationship. Consistent with the idea that attachment avoidance is associated with a deactivation of the attachment system (Fraley & Shaver, 1997), thinking about an avoidant relationship seemed to block attachment related motives, such as caring for others. Attachment avoidance is associated with a negative model of other and with a preference for keeping a distance between oneself and significant others, whereas communion is associated with forming connections with others. In Study 2, as predicted, thinking about an avoidant relationship biased men's self-perceptions of communal traits, such that men described themselves as less communal, that is, as less warm, kind, understanding, and cooperative. Of interest, additional analyses revealed that the attachment prime influenced men's self-reported negative communal traits in particular, such as being whiny, gullible, servile, and likely to subordinate oneself to others. This suggests that when a relationship

incites fears of dependency, a self-regulation mechanism is set off and traits associated with closeness, and especially the negative aspects of closeness, are minimized.

Finally, our third prediction was that contextually activating an anxious relationship should increase the accessibility of agency goals and should either decrease or increase explicit self-perceptions of agency traits. Attachment anxiety is associated with feeling that the self is unworthy of love and affection and with concerns about abandonment. Agency reflects a concern for the self, is associated with self-enhancement and self-protection, and is theorized to be related to self-relevant outcomes (Helgeson & Fritz, 2000). Activating an anxious relationship in which one is concerned about abandonment should be threatening to the self and, therefore, should trigger agency goals. As predicted, in Study 1, contextually priming an anxious-ambivalent relationship activated a self-orientation and agency goals, such as confidence, superiority, and competition.

Our prediction related to explicit self-perceptions of agency traits was more complicated. Consistent with research investigating chronic attachment, activating an anxious relationship may bias self-perceptions such that people see themselves as less independent and more inferior and passive (low in agency). Alternately, activating an anxious relationship may create a host of effects different from those found in chronic attachment research. Consistent with Andersen and Chen's (2002) theorizing, activating an anxious relationship may elicit a self-protective motive, leading individuals to describe themselves as high in agency to defend against the threat to the self brought about by the anxious relationship.

The second hypothesis was supported in the current investigation. Thinking about an anxious attachment relationship led to increased self-perceptions of agency traits for women. The fact that these results were specific to women suggests that agency may be a less central and more relationship-specific component of women's self-concept. Of interest, paralleling the results found for men's self-perceptions of communal traits, additional analyses revealed that the prime primarily influenced women's self-reported negative agency traits, such as being dictatorial, greedy, hostile in relations with others, and looking out only for oneself. These negative agency traits reflect a concern for the self at the expense of the welfare of others. We believe this finding further supports the self-protective motive and Andersen and Chen's (2002) theory in general. Andersen and Chen maintain that when there is a threat to the self and to the self's desire for relatedness, people often will protect the self in paradoxical ways, such as by emphasizing competencies and accomplishments (nonrelationship aspects of the self) designed to enhance the self-image. In our study, women chose to protect against the threat to their

relatedness needs posed by the anxious relationship by emphasizing those traits associated with their independence and, indeed, their independence at the expense of the welfare of others.

One contribution of the present research is that it represents an empirical shift from a correlational to an experimental methodology, enabling causal predictions about the effects of close relationships on the working self-concept to be tested. Prior studies investigating attachment and agency and communion have been correlational, making it difficult to understand the nature and direction of their relationship. This research also is consistent with the theoretical shift from conceptualizing attachment as a general disposition to emphasizing the importance of the contextual activation of specific attachment relationships. There is now a growing body of research documenting the effects of specific attachment relationships on interpersonal perceptions, expectations, and behaviors. Although the effects of specific attachment relationships overlap with those of people's global orientations, it is evident, as Pierce and Lydon (2001) note, that global and specific (i.e., contextually activated attachment relationships) relational models are not redundant constructs. Although they may share some common ground with people's global orientation, specific relational models can have unique effects.

With respect to attachment and agency and communion, previous research has focused solely on people's chronic or global attachment orientations, leaving unanswered questions about the effects of specific attachment relationships. In the present investigations, the effects of contextually activating secure and avoidant relationships on communion paralleled those found in research investigating chronic attachment; however, there were some unexpected and indeed paradoxical findings. Although Shaver et al. (1996) found chronic attachment security to be associated with both communion and agency, in the current investigation, contextually activating a secure relationship did not influence agency. This may have been because a relationship was being activated and, consequently, primarily relational (communal) goals and traits were stimulated. In addition, whereas chronic anxious attachment and fears of abandonment have been found to go hand in hand with feeling low in agency, in the current investigation, when fears of abandonment and rejection were contextually activated, a self-regulatory mechanism designed to protect the self was triggered, resulting in the activation of agency goals and increased self-perceptions of agency traits. This research suggests, then, that although people who chronically feel attachment anxiety have developed a sense of dependency, passivity, and low agency, when fears of abandonment become acute through contex-

tual activation, an immediate need to protect the self is set in motion and individuals react with increased agency.

This research also advances current knowledge about agency and communion. In addition to investigating self-reports, this research looked at the implicit activation of agency and communion. To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate agency and communion in this way. Although considerable work needs to be done in this area, this research reflects an effort to understand the process by which previously found associations between attachment and agency and communion occur. Related to this point is the issue of semantic priming. We have argued that contextually activating attachment relationships influences the working self-concept in terms of goals and self-perceptions related to agency and communion; however, it could be argued that simple semantic priming explains the present findings. That is, the words used in the relationship descriptions may have directly primed the target words in Study 1 and influenced people's responses to the EPAQ in Study 2. This explanation is consistent with the secure prime findings: Participants who read descriptions of a secure relationship displayed an increased activation of semantically related communal concepts. However, we believe this explanation is unlikely given the anxious prime results. If our results were simply an issue of semantic priming, reading a description of an anxious relationship should increase the accessibility of communal words and traits because those concepts are semantically related to the anxious attachment construct; however, this was not the case. In fact, reading about an anxious relationship decreased the accessibility of this construct and increased the accessibility of an unrelated construct, that is, agency. Thus, although semantic priming cannot be completely ruled out, we believe it is unlikely. That being said, future research could be conducted to address this issue; for example, by using a subliminal prime or by using the name of a specific attachment figure, attachment could be primed without reference to descriptions of specific attachment relationships.

Rather than semantic priming, we believe these results are better understood in terms of a working self-concept that is largely relational. This is consistent with the growing emphasis in personality theory on the importance of situational variables and "if-then" contingencies in personality (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). The working self-concept, which governs cognition, affect, and behavior, is not indifferent to its environment; it is a dynamic entity that responds to the environment and reflects different situational contexts. Moreover, the working self-concept is relational; it is shaped by significant others and relational experiences. Its stability arises

from the consistency with which a person interacts with others who activate the same self-in-relation-to-other representation. This research found that the way people see themselves is motivated by their attachment relationships, so that activating a specific attachment relationship—that may or may not be consistent with a person's chronic orientation—activated goals and biased self-perceptions.

In conclusion, we began this article by citing Helgeson's (1994) integrative review, which illustrated important gender differences in agency and communion, and noted that subsequent research has begun to explore the complexities underlying these gender differences. The current research adds to our understanding by reminding us that close relationships can produce dynamic effects on these two basic modes of human existence. Moreover, by adopting a contextual approach to attachment, this research begins to illuminate the more far-reaching contributions that the study of attachment can make to theory and research on the understanding of the self.

APPENDIX

Word Fragments and Their Possible Solutions

Agency-Positive Words

— — — erior (superior, inferior, interior)
con — — — ent (confident, continent)
— ct — ve (active, octave)

Agency-Negative Words

— oast (boast, toast)
— — eedy (greedy, speedy)
host — — — (hostile, hostess)

Communion-Positive Words

— ind (kind, mind)
war — (warm, warn)
gen — — — (gentle, genius)

Communion-Negative Words

— — iny (whiny, rainy)
na — (nag, nap)
— epe — — ent (dependent, repellent)

Agency/Communion Word

c — — p — — — tive (competitive, cooperative, comparative)

NOTES

1. The masculinity-femininity scale from the full 40-item Extended Personality Attributes Questionnaire (EPAQ) was not used because it was not related to the hypotheses of the study.

2. Chronic attachment was controlled for because it was thought that participants' chronic attachment style may interfere with the effects of the attachment manipulation on participants' self-reported agency and communion traits. It should be noted that the attachment manipulation did not influence participants' reports of chronic attachment. That is, priming a negative model of self (i.e., a preoccupied or avoidant-fearful attachment relationship) was not associated with increases in chronic anxious attachment and priming a negative model of other (i.e., an avoidant-dismissive or avoidant-fearful relationship) was not associated with increases in chronic avoidant attachment, both $F_s < .5$, *ns*. Moreover, priming attachment in general did not influence chronic anxious attachment or chronic avoidant attachment, both $F_s < .5$, *ns*. Finally, chronic attachment did not moderate the effects of the priming manipulation in Study 2.

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