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Re-construing the relational-interdependent self-construal and its relationship with self-consistency ☆

Kenneth D. Locke *, Lucia Christensen

Department of Psychology, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83844-3043, USA

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Abstract

Our study sought to: (1) tie the relational self-construal to the nomological net of the interpersonal circumplex and (2) show that prior self-construal research confounded consistent with desirable descriptions of self and others. Undergraduates ($n = 233$) completed measures of relational self-construal, Machiavellianism, the interpersonal circumplex, self-consistency, and self-friend consistency. Contrary to past research, the relational self-construal only predicted socially desirable types of consistency and did not moderate the effect of self-consistency on well-being. The relational self-construal was located in the communal-and-unagentic region of the circumplex, directly opposite Machiavellianism, and the circumplex and Machiavellianism scales predicted consistency at least as well as the relational self-construal, thus raising questions about whether the relational self-construal refers to a novel explanatory construct.

Keywords: Relational self-construal; Interpersonal circumplex; Machiavellianism; Self-consistency

1. Introduction

A relational self-construal refers to conceiving of one's self in terms of one's close relationships (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). The current paper critiques how the relational self-construal is currently defined and studied. Our main concern is that the relational self-

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* Corresponding author. Fax: +1 208 885 7710.
E-mail address: klocke@uidaho.edu (K.D. Locke).

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construal literature is disconnected from the broader interpersonal personality literature; accordingly, our first goal is to embed the relational self-construal within the comprehensive network of personality traits encompassed by the interpersonal circumplex. Our secondary concern is that relational self-construal research has used indices of personality consistency that were confounded with personality desirability; therefore, our second goal is to test whether a relational self-construal predicts describing oneself and one's friends in consistent terms (as previously reported) or merely in desirable terms.

1.1. Relational self-construal and consistency

Individual differences in the relational self-construal are assessed with the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (RISC; Cross et al., 2000). Items include "My close relationships are an important reflection of who I am" and "In general, my close relationships are an important part of my self-image." The RISC shows convergent validity with measures of agreeableness, empathy, and communal orientation (Cross et al., 2000). Cognitively, the RISC predicts having positive associations with relationship words and using close relationships to encode and organize social information (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002). Interpersonally, the RISC predicts viewing relationships as close and committed, weighing how others will experience personal decisions, and being self-disclosing (Cross et al., 2000; Cross & Morris, 2003; Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006).

Finally, five RISC studies assessed the consistency of descriptions of the self and others. Cross et al. (2002, Studies 5 and 6) had participants rate themselves and a friend on a set of traits. People with higher RISC scores showed stronger correlations between self-ratings and friend-ratings. (We refer to these *self-friend correlations* as r_{SF}.) Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003, Studies 1–3) had participants rate how much they showed various traits when with different significant others as well as in general. They defined self-consistency as the mean correlation across all pairs of self-descriptions. (We refer to these *self–self correlations* as r_{SS}. Cross et al. technically used a linear transformation of r_{SS}, but since it yields identical results, for simplicity we will use the r_{SS}.) On average there was a positive association between r_{SS} and well-being, but the correlation was weaker for people with higher RISC scores.

Unfortunately, Cross et al. (2003, 2002) did not distinguish desirable and undesirable descriptors when computing r_{SS} or r_{SF}, thus confounding consistency and desirability. To understand the problem, imagine participants have a list of 10 desirable and 10 undesirable traits. The participants indicate whether or not each trait describes how they act when with a particular friend by marking either Y (yes) or N (no). They then indicate whether or not each trait describes how they act when with a different friend. Let us call the number of desirable traits that are marked Y with both friends "$YY_{desirable}$," the number of desirable traits marked N with both friends "$NN_{desirable}$," the number of undesirable traits marked Y with both friends "$YY_{undesirable}$," and the number of undesirable traits marked N with both friends "$NN_{undesirable}$."

Now, imagine two different men: Desi and Unde. With both friends, Desi says Y to all the desirable traits and N to all the undesirable traits, whereas Unde says Y to all the undesirable traits and N to all the desirable traits. So, for Desi, $YY_{desirable} = NN_{undesirable} = 10$ and $YY_{undesirable} = NN_{desirable} = 0$, whereas for Unde, $YY_{desirable} = NN_{undesirable} = 0$ and $YY_{undesirable} = NN_{desirable} = 10$. Since Desi and Unde both have perfectly consistent (albeit very different) personalities, both have an $r_{SS} = 1$. Because (at least in American college samples) people endorse about twice as many

desirable descriptors as undesirable descriptors (Locke & Horowitz, 1997), there will generally be many more participants like Desi (with high rates of $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$) than participants like Unde (with high rates of $YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$). Consequently, the real reason why greater r_{SS} predicts greater well-being is because greater r_{SS} is associated with the *desirable* types of consistency ($YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$) and not with the *undesirable* types ($YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$) (Locke, 2006).

If r_{SS} and r_{SF} measure consistently *desirable* (rather than simply *consistent*) descriptions, then Cross et al.'s (2002, 2003) conclusions are suspect. Cross et al. (2003) suggested that the link between r_{SS} and well-being is weaker for people high in RISC because they place less value on consistency; however, if RISC only predicts a weaker relationship between well-being and *desirable* types of consistency, then this explanation must be modified. Likewise, Cross et al. (2002) suggested that people high in RISC describe themselves and friends similarly because they "include others in their self-representations"; however, if RISC only predicts describing friends as similarly *desirable*, then again this explanation must be modified. Therefore, one goal of the current study is to measure and analyze each subtype of consistency ($YY_{desirable}$, $YY_{undesirable}$, $NN_{desirable}$, and $NN_{undesirable}$) to evaluate if Cross et al.'s (2002, 2003) conclusions are valid.

1.2. The interpersonal circumplex as a nomological net

Our other, broader goal concerns construct validity. Construct validity involves locating a construct and its measures within a "nomological network" of other theoretically meaningful constructs and measures. Cross and her colleagues (2000, 2002, 2003) have primarily situated the relational self-construal in contrast to the independent self-construal (which defines the self by its enduring personal traits, attitudes, and goals) and the collectivistic-interdependent self-construal (which defines the self by its position within and obligations to a group). However, the independent and interdependent self-construals are relatively new constructs (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) whose definition and measurement have been plagued by problems that are detailed by Levine et al. (2003) and Oyserman et al. (2002).

In contrast, the interpersonal circumplex offers a comprehensive, well-established nomological system for validating interpersonal constructs and their measures (Gurtman, 1997; Wiggins, 2003). Fig. 1 shows that the interpersonal circumplex is defined by two orthogonal axes: a vertical "agency" (or dominance) axis and a horizontal "communion" (or friendliness) axis. Thus, each point in the interpersonal space can be specified as a weighted combination of agency and communion; put differently, the interpersonal circumplex offers a place for interpersonal dispositions reflecting all combinations of agency and communion. Factor analyses confirm that these two dimensions account for a large proportion of the variance in ratings of interpersonal behaviors and traits (e.g., Conte & Plutchik, 1981; Foa, 1961; Wiggins, 1979). The interpersonal circumplex has been used to organize and interpret a wide variety of personality measures (Gurtman, 1991; Wiggins & Broughton, 1985).

Therefore, the current study sought to place the relational self-construal within the comprehensive nomological net articulated by the interpersonal circumplex. Numerous interpersonal circumplex measures exist (Locke, in press). The current study used the Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values (CSIV) which assesses values or goals associated with each region of the circumplex (Locke, 2000). We hypothesized that individuals high in RISC would place great importance on communal values and less importance on agentic values.

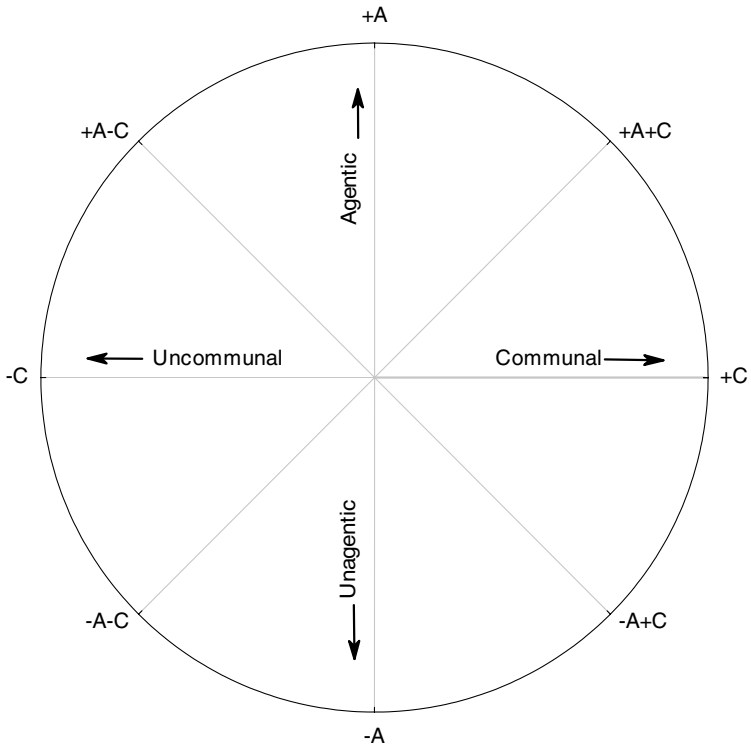

Fig. 1. The interpersonal circumplex.

We further predicted that if the RISC reflects valuing communion over agency, it would correlate negatively with traits that reflect valuing agency over communion. Machiavellianism is a well-researched exemplar of such a trait. Machiavellian individuals are characterized by an unconcerned, emotionally detached, manipulative attitude towards others (Christie & Geis, 1970). Machiavellianism is related to but not identical to Narcissism and Psychopathy; collectively, these three traits are called the "Dark Triad" of personality (McHoskey, Worzel, & Szyarto, 1998; Paulhus & Williams, 2002). The most popular measure of Machiavellianism, the MACH IV Scale, has been used in hundreds of studies (for reviews, see Christie & Geis, 1970; Fehr, Samson, & Paulhus, 1992). High MACH scores reliably predict competitive, deceptive, and manipulative behavior (Fehr et al., 1992; Wilson, Near, & Miller, 1996). Most relevant, high levels of MACH predict low levels of communion and at least moderate levels of agency (Gurtman, 1991, 1992).

In summary, we wish to place the relational self-construal within the nomological net of the interpersonal circumplex (and expect to place it in the communal and unagentic region, directly opposite Machiavellianism). We also aim to show that prior RISC research confounded consistent with desirable person descriptions. To achieve these goals, our study will replicate some of Cross et al.'s (2002, 2003) procedures, but will also assess Machiavellianism and the broader interpersonal circumplex as well as the four subtypes of consistency.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

College students (143 females, 90 males; age range = 18–50 years, $M = 21.8$, $SD = 4.0$) participated for extra credit in undergraduate psychology courses. Of those who reported their ethnicity, the most common responses were European American (82.6%), "Mixed/Other" (6.1%), Asian American (4.8%), and Hispanic/Latino (4.8%).

2.2. Materials

2.2.1. RISC

The RISC scale (Cross et al., 2000) is an 11-item self-report measure of relational self-construal. Responses were made on −2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree) scales. The RISC scale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Cross et al., 2000); in the current sample, Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$.

2.2.2. MACH IV

The MACH IV Scale (Christie & Geis, 1970) is a 20-item measure of Machiavellianism. Following Gurtman (1992), a few items were slightly reworded to make them gender neutral. A sample item is: "The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear". Responses were made on −2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree) scales. The scale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Robinson & Shaver, 1973); in the current sample, $\alpha = .72$.

2.2.3. CSIV

The CSIV (Locke, 2000) is a 64-item self-report measure of the subjective importance of experiencing varying degrees of agency and communion. For each item, respondents indicate how important it is that they act, appear, or are treated that way during social interactions on 0 (not important) to 4 (extremely important) scales. There are eight scales, one for each interpersonal circumplex octant. A sample item from the high-agency, low-communion octant is: "When I am with him/her/them, it is important that I keep the upper hand." (The entire CSIV may be viewed at www.class.uidaho.edu/klocke/csiv_form.htm.) The CSIV has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties (Locke, 2000); in the current sample the αs for the eight scales ranged from .72 to .84 ($M = .79$). Because the octant scales of the CSIV conform to a circumplex, we summarized the scales in terms of two underlying vectors using the following formulae: Agentic Values $= \Sigma S_i \sin\theta_i$ and Communal Values $= \Sigma S_i \cos\theta_i$, where S_i is the ith octant score, θ_i is the angle at the center of that octant, and the angles of the +C and +A octants were, respectively, 0° and 90°. For more details about this procedure and circumplex mathematics in general, see the appendix of Horowitz (2004).

2.2.4. Well-being

Cross et al. (2003, p. 937) operationalized well-being by summing standardized scores from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory (RSEI; Rosenberg, 1965), the Center for Epidemiological Studies—Depression (CESD; Radloff, 1977), and measures of positive and negative affect. For brevity, we only used the RSEI and CESD. The RSEI is a 10-item

self-esteem measure; a sample item is "I take a positive attitude towards myself." The CESD is a 20-item self-report depression measure; a sample item is "I felt sad." For psychometric properties of the RSEI and CESD, respectively, see Gray-Little, Williams, and Hancock (1997) and Orme, Reis, and Herz (1986). In the current sample, the RSEI and CESD both had αs = .89. The RSEI and CESD were strongly related ($r[231] = -.53$, $p < .001$) and yielded similar results. Therefore, following Cross et al. (2003), the RSEI and (reversed scored) CESD were converted to z-scores and summed to yield a measure of overall well-being.

2.2.5. Measures of self-consistency and self-friend similarity

Participants were asked to describe five targets: their self while with each of three different friends, their self "in general," and their "second-closest same-sex friend." We used second-closest friends because Cross et al. (2002) did so; their rationale was that second-closest friends are "important to the participants but not viewed as a critically self-defining relationship by all participants" (p. 410). Participants indicated whether or not each of 20 traits described each target by marking a "Y" or an "N" next to the trait. As Table 1 shows, the traits consisted of five sets of four traits each. Hampson (1998) created these trait sets so that within each trait set all of the traits loaded on one factor of the five-factor model of personality (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989), but two of the traits were desirable (with one from each pole of the factor) and two were undesirable (again with one from each pole of the factor). The participants were presented the traits in alphabetical order.

Participants' "Y" and "N" responses were dummy-coded as 1 and 0. Following Cross et al. (2002, Studies 5 and 6), self-friend similarity was operationalized as the correlation between the ratings of the self and the ratings of the friend on the 20 traits—that is, the r_{SF}. We also computed how often each participant reported that both the self and the friend had the same desirable trait ($YY_{desirable}$), had the same undesirable trait ($YY_{undesirable}$), lacked the same desirable trait ($NN_{desirable}$), or lacked the same undesirable trait ($NN_{undesirable}$). Because there were 10 desirable or undesirable traits, $YY_{desirable}$, $YY_{undesirable}$, $NN_{desirable}$, and $NN_{undesirable}$ could each range from 0 to 10.

Following Cross et al. (2003), self-consistency was operationalized as the r_{SS}—that is, the mean correlation between every pair of self-descriptions, including both the general and the relationship-specific descriptions. We also computed how often each participant described themselves consistently across two self-descriptions as having a particular desirable trait ($YY_{desirable}$), having a particular undesirable trait ($YY_{undesirable}$), lacking a particular desirable trait ($NN_{desirable}$), or lacking a particular undesirable trait ($NN_{undesirable}$). Because there were 10 desirable or undesirable traits and six pairs of self-descriptions, $YY_{desirable}$, $YY_{undesirable}$, $NN_{desirable}$, and $NN_{undesirable}$ could each range from 0 to 60.

Table 1
Trait pairs used in the current study

Trait dimension	Desirable trait pairs	Undesirable trait pairs
Openness	Cultured–down to earth	Snobbish—coarse
Conscientiousness	Self-disciplined–uninhibited	Rigid–unstable
Extraversion	Outspoken–modest	Boastful–withdrawn
Agreeableness	Tactful–straightforward	Vague–abrupt
Neuroticism	Spirited–stable	Temperamental–unemotional

2.3. Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires in small ($n < 7$) groups. The measures were administered in one of two different random orders. All participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire and after completing the questionnaire received a detailed debriefing form.

3. Results

Participants with missing data on one of the measures of consistency that involved making binary "yes" or "no" responses were omitted from analyses involving that task. Missing data from the other (ordinal) scales were replaced with the modal score for that scale.

3.1. RISC, MACH, and interpersonal values

First, we computed the Pearson r between RISC and MACH scores; as expected, RISC and MACH were inversely related, $r(231) = -.26$, $p < .001$. We also computed correlations between the MACH or RISC scales and the agentic and communal vectors of the CSIV. As hypothesized, RISC correlated positively with communal values and negatively with agentic values (r[231]s = .24 and −.14, ps < .05), whereas MACH correlated negatively with communal values and positively with agentic values (r[231]s = −.42 and .26, ps < .001). By plotting these correlations on a two-dimensional graph, Fig. 2 shows the overall location of the MACH and RISC scales within the circumplex of interpersonal values. The figure clearly locates MACH in the "agentic and uncommunal" region and RISC in the opposite "communal and unagentic" region.

3.2. Are RISC, MACH, and well-being related to self-consistency?

3.2.1. RISC

Table 2 shows a positive but weak relationship between RISC and the mean r_{SS}. Likewise, in Cross et al. (2003), the relationship between RISC and r_{SS} was positive but weak, and only statistically significant in one of the three studies. Separate analyses of the four types of self-consistency showed RISC was positively related to $YY_{desirable}$, but unrelated to the other types. In sum, RISC has a weak association with describing the self as exhibiting socially desirable qualities across friendships.

3.2.2. MACH

Table 2 shows that MACH and RISC tended to have opposite relationships with the self-consistency measures, and the strength of the relationships tended to be greater for MACH than RISC. Specifically, MACH correlated negatively with $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ (consistently admitting desirable and denying undesirable traits) and thus negatively with r_{SS} as well. However, MACH correlated positively with $YY_{undesirable}$ (consistently admitting undesirable traits). Thus, MACH does not predicts consistency consistently; instead, high MACH people are more consistent about showing undesirable traits but less consistent about showing desirable and hiding undesirable traits.

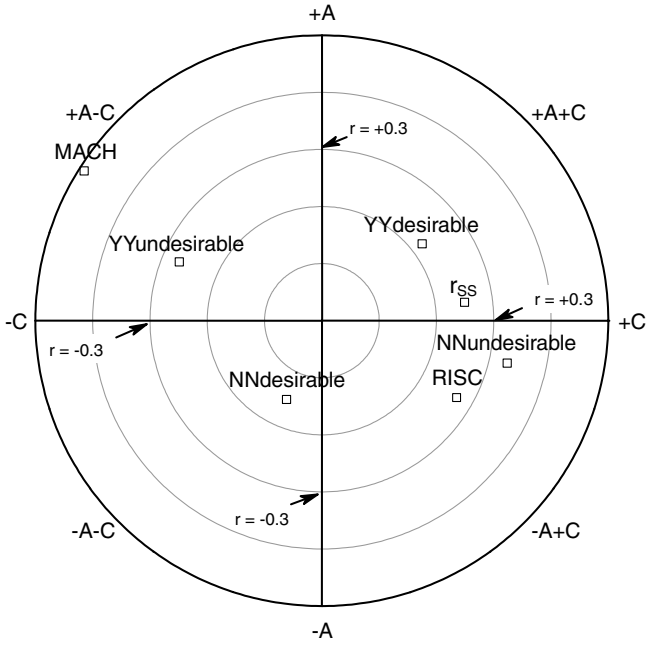

Fig. 2. Correlations between the agentic and communal axes of the CSIV and measures of self-consistency, RISC, and MACH.

3.2.3. Well-being

Table 2 shows that, as in previous studies, r_{SS} was positively related to well-being. Separate analyses of the four types of consistency showed that well-being was positively related to $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$, and weakly but *negatively* related to $NN_{desirable}$ and $YY_{undesirable}$. In other words, as expected, well-being was positively related to desirable types of consistency (being consistently good and not bad) and negatively related to undesirable types of consistency (being consistently bad and not good). For similar findings and a more detailed discussion, see Locke (2006).

Table 2
Zero-order correlations between RISC, MACH, or well-being and indices of self-consistency

Self-consistency index	RISC	MACH	Well-being
Mean r_{SS}	0.13*	−0.23***	0.25***
$YY_{desirable}$	0.15**	−0.13*	0.25***
$NN_{undesirable}$	0.07	−0.28***	0.24***
$YY_{undesirable}$	−0.02	0.17***	−0.13*
$NN_{desirable}$	−0.06	0.04	−0.13*

Note. The *n*s for the *r*s shown range from 219 to 222 due to missing data.

* $p < .1$.

** $p < .05$.

*** $p < .01$.

3.3. Does RISC moderate the self-consistency–well-being relationship?

To test whether RISC moderated the relationship between self-consistency and well-being, we used the procedure used in Cross et al. (2003): We regressed well-being on RISC (centered), mean r_{SS} (centered), and their multiplicative interaction. In contrast to the findings of Cross et al. (2003), in our data the interaction effect was not significant (standardized $\beta = .045$, $p = .5$), indicating that RISC did not moderate the r_{SS}–well-being relationship. We repeated the analysis on each of the four subtypes of consistency, but again none of the interaction effects were significant, all ps > .2. To test if Machiavellianism moderated the self-consistency–well-being relationship, we repeated the preceding analyses using MACH scores instead of RISC scores. The interactions between MACH and the self-consistency measures did not predict well-being, all ps > .1. In sum, in our data neither RISC nor MACH moderated the relationship between self-consistency and well-being.

3.4. Projections onto the circumplex of interpersonal values

Fig. 2 shows the correlations between the CSIV vector scores and the various measures of self-consistency. $YY_{undesirable}$ was located in the +A − C quadrant and $NN_{undesirable}$ in the (opposite) −A + C quadrant; and $YY_{desirable}$ was located in the +A + C quadrant and $NN_{desirable}$ in the (opposite) −A − C quadrant. Several interesting patterns are evident. First, agentic values predicted higher levels of "YY" than "NN" types of consistency. Second, communal values predicted more desirable (being good and not bad) than undesirable (being bad and not good) types of consistency. Third, higher communal values predicted higher r_{SS}, $r(219) = .25$, $p < .001$.

The r_{SS} results parallel the results for the desirable but not the undesirable types of consistency because the desirable types of consistency, $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ (Ms = 37.8 and 41.4, SDs = 10.2 and 11.6), were more common than the undesirable types, $YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$ (Ms = 6.1 and 10.2, SDs = 6.6 and 6.4). In other words, a high r_{SS} tended to reflect high levels of $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ rather than high levels of $YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$. Consequently, variance in the desirable types of consistency mediated the relationships between the personality measures and r_{SS}. After controlling for $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$, the effects of RISC, MACH, and communal values on r_{SS} were no longer significant, partial rs = .01, −.02, and −.04. Conversely, controlling for the variance in the undesirable types of consistency did not reduce the effects on r_{SS} of RISC (partial $r = .13$, $p = .06$), MACH (partial $r = -.21$, $p < .01$), or communal values (partial $r = .22$, $p = .001$).

3.5. Do RISC and MACH predict self-friend similarity?

Table 3 shows that there was a positive correlation between RISC and r_{SF}, thus replicating the findings of Cross et al. (2002) and suggesting that higher RISC predicts greater similarity in the descriptions of the self and a friend. However, Table 3 also shows that when we computed the correlations between RISC and the different types of self-friend consistency, RISC predicted only $YY_{desirable}$ (ascribing positive tendencies to both the self and a friend) and $NN_{undesirable}$ (denying negative tendencies in both the self and a friend). Thus, RISC predicts describing the self and the friend as similar in socially desirable ways only.

Table 3
Zero-order correlations between RISC, MACH, or communal values and indices of self-friend consistency

Consistency Index	RISC	MACH	CSIV-communal
r_{SF}	0.19***	−0.28***	0.21***
$YY_{desirable}$	0.16**	−0.16**	0.15**
$NN_{undesirable}$	0.12*	−0.25***	0.25***
$YY_{undesirable}$	0.03	0.02	−0.13*
$NN_{desirable}$	0.05	−0.09	−0.09

Note. The *n*s for the *r*s shown range from 219 to 222 due to missing data.
* $p < .1$.
** $p < .05$.
*** $p < .01$.

Table 3 shows that MACH and RISC had opposite relationships with the measures of self-friend similarity, and the relationships were stronger for MACH than for RISC. Specifically, MACH correlated negatively with $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ (and thus with r_{SF}); in other words, Machiavellianism predicts describing the self and a friend as dissimilar, but only with respect to not sharing socially desirable attributes.

Finally, the self-friend consistency measures correlated with communal values but not agentic values. Table 3 shows that correlations between self-friend consistency and communal values were similar to those for RISC and opposite to those for MACH. The one exception was that indicating that the self and a friend shared an undesirable trait was weakly but negatively related to communal values (but unrelated to RISC or MACH). Overall, though, the pattern was for higher levels of communal values or RISC and lower levels of MACH to predict describing the self and a friend as having the same virtues and as lacking the same vices (but did *not* predict describing the self and friend as sharing the same vices or as lacking the same virtues).

Like the r_{SS} results, the r_{SF} results parallel the results for the desirable but not the undesirable types of consistency because the desirable types of consistency, $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ (Ms = 5.7 and 6.6, SDs = 2.1 and 2.4), were more common than the undesirable types, $YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$ (Ms = 0.9 and 1.4, SDs = 1.2 and 1.2). Consequently, variance in desirable types of consistency mediated the relationships between the personality measures and r_{SF}. Controlling for $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ reduced or eliminated the relationship between r_{SF} and RISC (partial $r = .07$, *ns*), MACH (partial $r = -.15$, $p < .05$), or communal values (partial $r = -.03$, *ns*). Conversely, controlling for the variance in the undesirable types of consistency did not alter the relationship between r_{SF} and RISC (partial $r = .19$), MACH (partial $r = -.28$), or communal values (partial $r = .21$), ps < .005.

4. Discussion

The current study had two aims. First, it used the general framework of the interpersonal circumplex and the specific reference point of Machiavellianism to clarify the meaning of the relational self-construal construct. Second, it used differentiated measures of consistency to refine the conclusions of previous relational self-construal studies. In the following discussion, we first summarize our findings, then note their limitations, and finally suggest their broader implications.

4.1. Summary of findings

As hypothesized, individuals higher in RISC tended to put greater importance on experiencing and expressing communion and lesser importance on experiencing and expressing agency. Thus, RISC was located in the +A − C quadrant of the interpersonal circumplex. In accord with previous research (Gurtman, 1991, 1992), individuals higher in MACH tended to put greater importance on experiencing and expressing agency and lesser importance on experiencing and expressing communion. Thus, as hypothesized, MACH was located in the −A + C quadrant of the circumplex, directly opposite from where RISC was located.

RISC and MACH tended to show opposite relationships with measures of consistency. Specifically, r_{SS} and r_{SF} correlated negatively with MACH and positively with RISC (and positively with communal values more generally). Because the desirable types of consistency ($YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$) occurred much more frequently than the undesirable types of consistency ($YY_{undesirable}$ and $NN_{desirable}$), r_{SS} and r_{SF} were essentially indices of the desirable types of consistency. Therefore, the results for the desirable types of consistency largely mirrored the results for r_{SS} and r_{SF}. Specifically, $YY_{desirable}$ and $NN_{undesirable}$ correlated negatively with MACH and positively with RISC (and positively with communal values more generally).

In sum, what r_{SS} and r_{SF} actually measure, and what communal traits (such as high levels of RISC and low levels of MACH) actually predict, are *consistently desirable* (rather than simply consistent) descriptions. Indeed, high MACH people ascribed undesirable descriptors to themselves *more consistently* than did low MACH people. Therefore, we must revise the conclusions of previous RISC research. In particular, Cross et al. (2002) asserted: "For the person with a highly relational self-construal, close others will be represented as part of the self, leading to similar descriptions of the self and close others" (p. 413). However, the current results suggest that the assumption of people high in communal values (such as those high in RISC or low in MACH) is not "my friends and I are similar," but "my friends and I are similarly wonderful."

Contrary to the findings of Cross et al. (2003), we found no evidence that RISC moderated the effect of self-consistency on well-being, which was both unexpected and disappointing (since one goal of our study was to better understand this moderating effect). The most obvious explanation for the discrepancy between their results and ours is methodological: Cross et al. provided respondents with more traits (i.e., 32 versus 20) and more response options for each trait (i.e., a 5-point versus a 2-point rating scale). On the other hand, our materials were sensitive enough to demonstrate relationships between self-consistency and well-being; in fact, Cross et al. and the current study reported equally strong correlations between r_{SS} and well-being. Regardless, if our null results were due to the number of traits and response options we provided, it suggests that the moderating effect of RISC is relatively delicate. Future research is apparently needed to clarify the conditions under which RISC does versus does not moderate the relationship between self-consistency and well-being.

Finally, we should note one unanticipated finding: People higher in agentic values were more likely to consistently endorse traits than consistently deny traits (regardless of whether the traits were desirable or undesirable). A possible explanation of this intriguing finding is that cross-situational consistency in expressing behaviors ("I am abrupt with Joe and with Sue") is an expression of agency, whereas cross-situational consistency in

suppressing behaviors ("I am abrupt with neither Joe nor Sue") is an expression of submission. One way future research could explore this hypothesis experimentally is to test whether inducing or priming respondents to feel confident and agentic increases their tendency to report that there are numerous traits that they always express, whereas inducing respondents to feel insecure and submissive increases their tendency to report that there are numerous traits that they never express.

4.2. Limitations

One limitation of the current data is that there was more variance in the desirable types of consistency than in the undesirable types of consistency. Therefore, limited variance may be partly responsible for the undesirable types of consistency having fewer and weaker relationships with the personality measures. A second limitation is that our participants were American undergraduates. Other samples may yield different results. For example, participants from collectivistic cultures—where self-enhancement is less valued—may show more "undesirable" consistency and less "desirable" consistency and may express communion by applying fewer desirable terms to the self than a friend (thereby *lowering* self-friend consistency). A third limitation is that self-reports may not reflect behaviors. For instance, people high in communal or low in uncommunal traits may report sharing desirable attributes with their friends because either: (a) they and their friends actually *are* blessed with many socially desirable qualities (including being high in communal and low in uncommunal traits) or (b) they simply *think* they and their friends that way (but in reality it is not true).

5. Conclusions

Our research showed that prior RISC studies conflated consistency with desirability and that the RISC only predicts socially desirable types of self-consistency and self-friend similarity. Moreover, the MACH and the CSIV predicted consistency as well as the RISC did, which raises a critical question: Does the RISC explain phenomena that more established measures (e.g., the MACH) or more comprehensive measures (e.g., the CSIV) do not? Certainly a case can be made for using a narrow scale like the RISC rather than a broad interpersonal circumplex inventory like the CSIV, and a case can be made for creating a new scale like the RISC rather than using an old scale like the MACH. Unfortunately, such a case has never been made or even attempted.

New constructs and measures bear the burden of proving that they convey information that existing constructs and measures do not. Therefore, future research that uses the RISC must demonstrate that the RISC has explanatory power that other personality scales (in particular, scales that clearly load on the +A − C to −A + C dimension) lack. Absent such evidence, there is no basis for asserting that the RISC measures or the "relational self-construal" refers to a distinct and informative psychological construct.

Once, Machiavellianism was a promising new construct. Now, the relational-interdependent self-construal is a promising new construct. When researchers fail to recognize the connections between old and new constructs—like MACH and RISC—they may forget (and then unwittingly rediscover) past work. Thus, cumulative scientific progress depends on locating specific constructs within a more encompassing and enduring conceptual framework. We hope the current paper shows how the interpersonal circumplex, by

providing a simple yet powerful framework for organizing interpersonal constructs and measures, can expedite this type of cumulative progress and broad understanding.

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