The development and validation of the Relational Self-esteem Scale

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INTRODUCTION

Recent research has distinguished the three different dimensions of the self: personal, relational, and collective (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). The personal self refers to the differentiated and individuated self-concept which emphasizes one’s uniqueness. The relational self refers to self-concept which is formed in connection with significant others (e.g. family and best friends). The collective self refers to self-concept that is built on relationships with social groups (e.g. nationality and ethnicity).

On the other hand, from a cross-cultural perspective, Markus and Kitayama (1991) have posited a distinction between independent and interdependent self-construals and elaborated upon the cultural influences on self-construals: people in individualistic cultures tend to define themselves in terms of internal attributes such as abilities and values and are more likely to hold an independent self-construal, whereas those in collectivistic cultures tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships with others (especially significant others) and are more likely to have an interdependent self-construal. As Brewer and Gardner claimed (1996), independent self-construal is closely associated with personal self and those with an independent self-construal would deem their personal self to be more important. On the other hand, interdependent self-construal is more closely related to relational self and those with an interdependent self-construal would attach more significance to their relational selves.

Based on these, researchers have developed different instruments to measure these dimensions of the self (for a review, see Brewer & Chen, 2007). For example, Kashima and Hardie (2000) developed the Relational, Individual, and Collective Self-Aspects Scale to assess the three facets of self-concept. In their study, they validated the three-factor structure of the scale which emphasized the importance of distinguishing among the three self-aspects.

Corresponding to the different self-aspects (i.e., personal, relational, and collective), individuals can evaluate their self-worth in relation to these three dimensions (Brekler & Greenwald, 1986). The evaluative motivations associated with the personal, relational, and collective self can be referred to as personal self-esteem, relational self-esteem, and collective self-esteem respectively. Personal self-esteem refers to how individuals perceive themselves and their personal attributes such as competence and talent (Rosenberg, 1965). The bulk of the research has been conducted on personal self-esteem, and it has been found that personal self-esteem is positively associated with mental health, happiness, and one’s capacity for creative and productive work (for a review, see Taylor & Brown, 1988). Recent research has also emphasized the importance of collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) which refers to how individuals perceive themselves with respect to the value they place on their social group. Collective self-esteem has been found to be associated with ingroup bias (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990) and psychological well-being (e.g., Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine & Broadnax, 1994; Zhang, 2005). However, there has been a dearth of research on relational self-esteem.

A few studies have tried to distinguish the function of relational self-esteem from personal self-esteem and indicated that relational self-esteem is a distinct construct and has a different function from personal self-esteem. For example, in a study conducted by Harter, Waters, and Whitesell (1998), they found that when adolescents evaluated their self-worth across relational contexts (e.g., with parents, teachers, male classmates, and female classmates), these four aspects of relational self-worth showed differential correlations with global self-worth (Harter et al., 1998; see also Wagner, 2009). De Cremer and Sedikides (2008) investigated the influence of procedural fairness on self-esteem and found that when college students enjoyed a positive reputation and when they received unfair treatment, their relational self-esteem which was assessed as their judgment of how their supervisors evaluated them, rather than their personal self-esteem decreased. Snell Jr and Finney (2002) developed the Relational Assessment Questionnaire to assess relational self-esteem, relational depression, and relational preoccupation with regard to intimate relationships. In their study, relational self-esteem as regards intimate relationships was found to be negatively associated with depression.

Taken together, these studies show relational self-esteem as a distinct construct that has a meaningful relationship to theoretically relevant variables. However, a limitation of these previous measures of relational self-esteem is that they focused on assessing self-worth in specific relational contexts (e.g., school, romantic relationships) so that their applicability to the general population is limited. In addition, compared to family and best friends, school teachers, classmates, and university supervisors are more likely to be considered as a social group that is involved in the collective self rather than relational self (Andersen & Cole, 1990; Andersen, Glassman & Gold, 1998). Hence, the current research confined significant others to the family, which can include parent, uncle/aunt, grandparent, children, sibling, and partner, etc., and best friends. In this way, the scope of the relational self is clearly distinct from collective self so that the measure on relational self-esteem would have the potential to accurately assess individuals’ self-worth derived from their relationships with significant others.

A measure of global relational self-esteem which assesses individuals’ membership in the circle of family and best friends would be helpful in advancing theory and research on the motivational aspects of the self. To date, the greatest amount of research on self-esteem has focused on personal self-esteem. The development of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), however, has spurred research beyond personal self-esteem to some extent (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Crocker et al., 1994). A lot of research has shown that the relational self tends to play a more significant role than the collective self, especially in collectivistic cultures (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Hence, we suggest that its concomitant, relational self-esteem, would be a good predictor of social behavior and mental health, and its investigation would help display a fuller picture of the motivational aspects of the self.

The notion of relational self-esteem has implications for cross-cultural research. Although many theorists have distinguished the relational self from the personal self and the collective self (e.g., Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Triandis, 1989), most cross-cultural research on self-esteem has focused only on self-worth at the individual level (for a review, see Heine, Lehman, Markus & Kitayama, 1999) which may be construed as a form of Western bias. Markus and Kitayama (1991) summarized the difference between American and Japanese self-construals. They proposed that East Asians with a more salient interdependent self-construal would primarily address relationships with significant others, more than the personal self or their relationship with large social groups. Hence, the motives associated with the relational self might be more informative than the motives associated with personal and collective selves among East Asians.

Due to the need for a scale to assess self-worth in the context of relationships with significant others, we developed the present measure. Our Relational Self-Esteem Scale aims to assess individuals’ global self-evaluation primarily based on their relationships with family and friends. Our rationale for this is that a global measure of relational self-esteem would parallel previous scales developed to measure personal self-esteem and collective self-esteem (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Rosenberg, 1965) and will prove helpful for researchers to compare the outcomes associated with relational self-esteem to other types of self-esteem.

The scale we developed consists of two basic dimensions: (1) association with family and best friends as significant others and (2) one’s value in relationships with significant others and the value of significant others. As regards the first dimension, significant others are mostly confined to family and best friends (Chen, Boucher & Tapias, 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Perception of warm relationships with parents and peers (i.e., parental attachment and peer attachment) has been found to be positively related to one’s self-esteem (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987; Greenberg, Siegel & Leitch, 1983).

Even in collectivistic cultures, the scope of close others is not much bigger than the one in individualistic cultures. For example, in the Chinese culture, the family has been regarded as the basic social unit since ancient times (Ho, 1998). In addition, individuals in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures tend to consider friends as a relational group which differs from strangers (e.g., Kobayashi & Greenwald, 2003; Tice, Butler, Muraven & Stillwell, 1995). Hence, the relationship including family and friends constitutes one dimension of the scale. As regards the second dimension, we included one’s value in relationships with significant others and the value of significant others. One’s value in relationships with significant others refers to individuals’ judgments of how worthy they are in relationships with significant others. This sense of self-worth is different from personal self-worth (Rosenberg, 1965) in terms of its dependence on how much an individual can contribute to his/her significant others, and is different from collective self-worth (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) in terms of its target as it is limited to relationships with significant others rather than a global social group, such as a national or ethnic group. The value of significant others refers to individuals’ and perceived others’ judgments of how worthy their significant others are. This is consistent with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) which posits that self-worth can be derived both from self-evaluation and others’ evaluation of one’s social groups. Given the crucial role of significant others in one’s life, the internalized relationships with significant others may exert a great impact upon one’s self-concept and self-esteem (Baldwin, 1992) and the influence from significant others on self-esteem would be different from that derived from global social groups (Arbona & Power, 2003; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Two studies are reported in this paper. Study 1 will report on the initial development of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale and the use of both within-network and between-network approaches to construct validation. Study 2 will report on the psychometric properties of a revised measure of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale which was modified from Study 1.

STUDY 1

Scale construction

We adopted a rational approach to construct the scale (Brown, 1983). We included the type of relationship and the perspective of
evaluation as two dimensions. There are two types of relationship: family and friends, and two perspectives of evaluation: one’s value in relationships with significant others and the value of significant others. Hence, the scale appears as a 2 × 2 construction and contains eight items (two items in every cell). In addition, the wording of the items was modeled after the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) because Rosenberg’s scale has shown good reliability and validity across cultures. Thus, the present Relational Self-Esteem Scale attempted to measure how individuals valued themselves in their group of family and friends (e.g., ‘In general, I am glad to be a member of my circle of friends’) and how they valued their own relational group of family or friends (e.g., ‘I am proud of my family’). Within these eight items, we used two negatively worded items, that is, ‘I feel I do not have much to offer to my family’ and ‘I often feel I am a useless member of my circle of friends’. Responses to the scale were made on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree) with higher values indicating a greater degree of endorsement.

Study 1 adopted a construct validation approach (King & Du, 2011; Marsh, 1997; Martin, 2007) to the empirical assessment of the validity of our Relational Self-Esteem Scale. Studies that adopt this approach can be classified as within- or between-network studies. Within-network construct validation refers to the examination of the factor structure and factor correlation matrix using statistical techniques such as reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). On the other hand, between-network validation involves examining patterns of relationships between the instrument and other theoretically related constructs (Marsh, 1997) through looking at its correlations. Study 1 utilized both approaches. First, we conducted a within-network study by focusing on the results of the internal consistency coefficients and the results of the CFA. Second, we conducted the between-network study by looking at the relationship of our scale with other theoretically relevant variables. In line with research on relational self-esteem showing a positive correlation with personal self-esteem (Harter et al., 1988), we predicted that relational self-esteem would positively correlate with personal self-esteem. We also predicted that relational self-esteem would correlate with the collectivism construct, the degree to which individuals emphasize social interdependence, connectedness, and mutual deference as dominant values, but not with the individualism construct, the degree to which individuals emphasize independence, autonomy in choice and action, and social assertiveness (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988). In addition, considering that women have been found to show stronger relational self-construal than men (Cross, Bacon & Morris, 2000), in a related vein, we predicted that women would report higher relational self-esteem than men. Thus we also investigated possible gender differences in terms of relational self-esteem.

Method

Participants. The relevant questionnaires were administered to 109 female and 47 male students with ages ranging from 17 to 29 (M = 21.65, SD = 2.16) at a university in Mainland, China.

Results and discussion

Preliminary analyses. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities. Results indicated that all the scales used had acceptable reliabilities (Nunally & Bernstein, 1994).

Confirmatory factor analyses. Normality was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis values for each item. Absolute values of skewness and kurtosis beyond 2 and 7, respectively, may imply a lack of univariate normality (Finney & DiStefano, 2006). In our study, skewness values ranged from –0.68 to 0.42, while kurtosis ranged from –0.34 to 1.67. We also checked for outliers by looking at the Mahalanobis distance (D2). No such outliers were found. Given that the data appear normally distributed, maximum likelihood (ML) estimation was employed.

Table 2 presents the results of our confirmatory factor analysis. We posited three different models: a one-factor model which considers relational self-esteem as a unidimensional construct, a two-factor family-friend model which posits a distinction between family-related and friend-related items, and a two-factor self-significant others model which posits separating the self-value in relationship to significant others from the value of significant others.

Based on the understanding that multiple indices provided a comprehensive evaluation of model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999), several goodness-of-fit indices were used. To check which model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruments</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational self-esteem</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal self-esteem</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 156.
would show a better fit to the data, we used the chi-square difference test.

Results of the CFA indicate that there were no significant differences between the one-factor model (Model 1) and two-factor family-friends model (Model 2) or the two-factor self-significant others model (Model 3) as shown through the non-significant chi-square difference tests (See Table 2). Model 1 showed good fit with the data. The chi-square value was non-significant and the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio was less than 2. RMSEA was less than the recommended cut-off of 0.08 and the TLI, CFI, GFI, AGFI and IFI values were all greater than 0.90. Since Model 1 was the most parsimonious among the three proposed models, we chose this model as the one that best represented the data. These results seem to show that relational self-esteem can be characterized as a unidimensional construct.

Correlations with other theoretically relevant constructs. Table 3 shows the zero-order correlations of relational self-esteem with other theoretically related constructs.

The correlation table indicates that relational self-esteem was positively correlated with collectivism ($r = 0.52, p < 0.001$), but not significantly correlated with individualism. Relational self-esteem was also positively related with personal self-esteem. These relationships are in line with our hypotheses.

Although Study 1 provided initial evidence for the validity of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale, we found that the two negatively worded items showed low correlations with other six positively worded items and decreased the reliability of the scale. In addition, for the CFA of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale, we had to correlate the errors associated with the two negatively worded items because of the relatively large modification index associated with these two items (MI = 13.00). In a study with the mass testing of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) across 53 nations, Schmitt & Allik (2005) found the same ‘negative item bias’. This refers to the phenomenon whereby participants responded to negatively worded items in a systematically different way from the way they responded to positively worded items. To eliminate the response bias when individuals answered the negatively worded items, we paraphrased the two negatively worded items to become positively worded and conducted a second study to further examine the validity as well as reliability. In addition, the eighth item of our scale, ‘In general, most people consider my family to be better than other families’, also showed low correlation and a non-significant factor loading in the CFA analysis. Chinese participants might consider this item requiring them to draw a social comparison between their own family and others. Because it is not valued for people in a collectivistic cultural context to present self-serving or group-serving bias (Heine & Lehman, 1997), the responses of participants to the eighth item might be influenced by cultural norms. As such, we deleted this item in Study 2. We retested this modified scale in the second study.

Gender differences. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the scores of male students and female students on relational self-esteem. Surprisingly, results indicated that there were no significant gender differences between male ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.35$) and female ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.32$) students, $t(154) = 0.076, p = 0.94$. In Study 2, we also examined this issue.

STUDY 2

Method

Participants. Participants were 128 students from two universities in Mainland, China. Of these, 8 participants did not complete the scale, leaving the data of 73 female and 47 male students with an average age of 20.28 ($SD = 2.93$) for further analysis.

Instruments. Participants completed the Relational Self-Esteem Scale on a four-point Likert scale, and a demographic questionnaire. The Relational Self-Esteem Scale used was similar to the one used in Study 1, except that the two negatively worded items were changed into positively worded items and item 8 was deleted.

Results and discussion

The revised version of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale had a higher reliability ($z = 0.86, M = 2.60, SD = 0.49$) compared to the previous version. CFA was then conducted to assess the within-network construct validity of the scale. Three CFA models were tested similar to the one conducted in Study 1: a one-factor model which considers relational self-esteem as a unidimensional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>$\chi^2$/df</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>NNFI or TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>AGFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>Change in $\chi^2$</th>
<th>Change in df</th>
<th>$P$ Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model 1 (one factor model)</td>
<td>29.73</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 2 (family-friend model)</td>
<td>26.22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model 3 (self-significant others model)</td>
<td>26.23</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: In all the models tested, the error terms for the two reversed items (item 3 and item 5) were correlated. Model 2 and Model 3 were compared against Model 1.
construct (Model 1), a two-factor family-friend model which posits a distinction between family-related and friend-related items (Model 2), and a two-factor self-significant others model which posits separating the self-value in relationship to significant others from the value of significant others (Model 3).

Similar to Study 1, results of the CFA indicated that there were no significant differences between the one-factor model (Model 1) and two-factor family-friends model (Models 2) or the two-factor self-significant others model (Model 3) as shown through the non-significant chi-square difference tests (see Table 4), as such, we adopted Model 1 considering it as the most parsimonious model. Model 1 showed good fit with the data: RMSEA was less than 0.08, while the TLI, CFI, GFI, AGFI and IFI values were all greater than 0.90. In addition, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio was less than 2 (see Table 4). All factor loadings were also statistically significant (see Table 5).

Taken together, the results provide support to the construct validity of our newly developed Relational Self-Esteem Scale. It demonstrated acceptable reliability and also showed a good model fit as evinced through the CFA. We found that relational self-esteem can be conceptualized as a unidimensional construct.

An independent sample t-test was also conducted to compare the scores of males and females on relational self-esteem. Results indicated that female students \(M = 2.68, SD = 0.47\) had a higher degree of relational self-esteem compared to male students \(M = 2.47, SD = 0.51\), \(t(118) = 2.36, p < 0.05\).

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

This paper proposed a relational self-esteem construct evaluated in relation to significant others and developed the Relational Self-Esteem Scale. CFA showed that the one-factor did not differ significantly from the alternative two-factor models. This was the case for both Study 1 and Study 2. Because of this, we decided to adopt the one-factor model given that it is more parsimonious. Moreover, the validity of this one-factor model is also supported in the literature. Significant others in the relational self include family and best friends. Major theories relevant to relational self consider these two resources to serve a combined function of the self (Chen et al., 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, from a theoretical perspective, the one-factor model is more reasonable than the two-factor model which posits a distinction between family and best friends.

Moreover, another dimension is the distinction between one’s value in relationships with significant others and the value of significant others. This distinction may be strongly influenced by self-construal of sample. If participants have high interdependent self-construal (e.g., North Americans), they may clearly distinguish their own values from the values of significant others so that the two-factor model may be revealed. It is a limitation that the current research did not address this issue by cross-cultural validation. We believe that future research will offer a clear answer to this question.

This scale also showed good internal consistency as evinced by the acceptable Cronbach’s alphas. The good-fit of the one-factor model indicates that individuals may tend to consider relational self-esteem as a unidimensional construct. This finding is not surprising among Chinese, East Asians have been found to have an interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and to have a tendency to define the self by including significant others (i.e., family, best friends) (Zhu, Zhang, Fan & Han, 2007). Given that East Asians include significant others in their self-concept, they might regard the goodness of significant others as the part of their own self-esteem. A Chinese saying that “The mother’s honour increases as her son’s position rises” reflects the important role that significant others play in terms of a Chinese’s self-worth.

Correlational analyses of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale with other theoretically relevant constructs demonstrated between-network construct validity. Relational self-esteem and personal self-esteem both refer to the evaluation of self-worth, but differ with regard to the sources of self-worth. The positive correlations between the two types of self-esteem represented their commonality and relational, rather than personal, self-esteem positively correlating with the collectivism construct indicated that the former is relevant with a group-based identity whereas the latter may not be (Study 1).

It is interesting to find female participants showing a higher relational self-esteem than male participants, but only in Study 2. This result is consistent with previous research (Cross et al., 2000) showing that females have a higher relational interdependent self-construal than males and that their relational selves are more salient. In Study 1, we did not observe a significant gender difference in relational self-esteem. This may be due to the lower reliability of the Relational Self-Esteem Scale in Study 1. Future research is needed to confirm the current finding.

Given the significant role of positive self-evaluation on mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988), we would predict that individuals with a high relational self-esteem would also have higher life satisfaction. Although researchers have established that personal self-esteem benefits mental health, recent research indicated that collective and relational self-esteem are related to mental health too. Collective self-esteem has been shown to be positively

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>(\chi^2/df)</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>NNFI or TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>GFI</th>
<th>AGFI</th>
<th>IFI</th>
<th>Change in (\chi^2)</th>
<th>Change in df</th>
<th>(p) value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidimensional model (Model 1)</td>
<td>23.85</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-friend model (Model 2)</td>
<td>23.41</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.037</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-significant others model (Model 3)</td>
<td>21.95</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Model 2 and Model 3 were compared against Model 1.
Table 5. Item-total correlations, CFA loadings, p values for the Relational Self-Esteem Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Corrected item-total correlation</th>
<th>CFA loading</th>
<th>p values for the CFA loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am a worthy member of my circle of friends.</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In general, I’m glad to be a member of my circle of friends.</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I feel I can have much to offer to my family.</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am proud of my family.</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I can help my friends a lot.</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Overall, my circle of friends is considered good by others.</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I think my family is proud of me.</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>(p &lt; 0.001)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

associated with life satisfaction (Crocker et al., 1994; Zhang, 2005). In terms of relational self-esteem, Wagner (2009) examined the relationship between relational self-esteem and life satisfaction, in which relational self-esteem was measured with Aron et al.’s Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron & Smol lan, 1992). This study revealed that relational self-esteem is positively associated with life satisfaction; moreover, relational self-esteem was negatively correlated with depression (Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Snell Jr & Finney, 2002). These findings suggest that in addition to personal self-esteem, self-esteem derived from social relationships (i.e., collective self-esteem, relational self-esteem) would also contribute to psychological adjustment.

As we argued before, relational self-esteem in previous research has been only explored in specific contexts or with specific relationships (e.g., school, classmate). Based on previous literature on the scope of significant others and the profound influence of significant others on different aspects of life, the Relational Self-Esteem Scale developed in the current research clearly directs participants to set up family and friends as target relationships so that it has potential to increase the validity of assessing relational self-esteem. Moreover, an advantage of the current scale is that it does not limit significant others to specific relationships (e.g., romantic partners, classmates), which may not be applicable for certain groups of people. Significant others as defined in the current research (e.g., family and best friends) is deemed to be more universal and is more applicable to different individuals.

Compared to collective self-esteem, relational self-esteem might be a more stable indicator of self-esteem in relationships with others. Individuals derive relational self-esteem from their relationship to significant others and this group is relatively known and identifiable (e.g., parent, partner, and sibling) (Chen et al., 2006). However, for collective self-esteem, the scope of the social group is relatively indefinite and large individual differences confound the measurement. Meanwhile, it is possible that individuals would consider significant others as a social group (e.g., family) when they are asked to respond to collective self-esteem when the scope of social group is not specified as is the case in the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). These could lead to ambiguity with regard to the interpretation of the scores given that there is a mismatch between what the respondents think refers to the social groups and what the psychologists using the Collective Self-Esteem Scale defines as the social group. Hence, future research is needed to further investigate the relationship between relational and collective self-esteem in specific contexts. Is relational self-esteem closely associated with collective self-esteem and what factors moderate the relationship between them? Can relational and collective self-esteem be activated separately and what contexts would determine the (joint) activation? How does culture (individualism vs. collectivism) influence the strength of the two forms of self-esteem? These types of questions await future research.

Future research should also address how relational self-esteem is relevant to other psychological constructs that are closely associated with relational self, such as relational self-construal (e.g., Cross et al., 2000), parental and peer attachment (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Considering that relational self-esteem is derived from the relationship with significant others, the quality of relationship would influence to what extent one can attain a sense of self-worth from significant others. For example, attachment style may play a role in one’s maintenance of relational self-esteem. Compared to people with a dismissing, preoccupied, or fearful attachment relationship with significant others, those with a secure attachment relationship may be more likely to believe in their prominent roles in the relationship and thereby attain higher relational self-esteem.

A limitation of our study was that the Relational Self-Esteem Scale was only tested among Chinese who can be characterized as collectivists. As mentioned before, Chinese define the self by including significant others so that they might regard their own value and the value of significant others as a global source of relational self-esteem. Indeed, the current study showed that the unidimensional model did not significantly differ compared to the alternative two-factor models. However, in the Western culture, results might be different and it might be possible that a two-factor model would be more appropriate for Westerners. Future studies are needed to test the Relational Self-Esteem Scale on Western samples. Another limitation is that we were not able to compare our current measure of relational self-esteem to other current measures of relational self-esteem (e.g., Harter et al., 1998) in the current paper. However, this work is an initial exploratory study. Future studies could simultaneously test different measures of relational self-esteem and compare them to each other.

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