Beware of Friends:
The Cultural Psychology of Relational Mobility and Cautious Intimacy

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Abstract

Previous research has contrasted patterns of cautious or prevention-oriented relationality in various West African settings with patterns of growth or promotion-oriented relationality in many North American settings. The present research draws upon the concept of relational mobility to test the hypothesis that different patterns of relationality have their source in respective affordances for embedded interdependence or abstracted independence. Study 1 investigated the relationship between cautious intimacy and perception of relational mobility among a sample of Hong Kong students. Study 2 compared students in Hong Kong and North American settings to test whether differences in perception of relational mobility mediated hypothesized differences in caution about friends. Study 3 used an experimental manipulation among a sample of Hong Kong students to test the hypothesis that increased perception of relational mobility reduces caution about friends. Results reveal broad support for hypotheses. Whether as a measured variable or as an experimental treatment, the perception of relational mobility was negatively related to caution about friends. Moreover, this relationship mediated hypothesized cross-national differences in caution about friendship. Discussion of results considers intersections of cultural and ecological approaches to psychology and implications for theoretical conceptions of interdependence.

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The idea of cautious intimacy—that one should “beware of friends” and others in intimate spaces—is a common theme in social discourse and everyday practice in the various West African settings where Adams (2005) conducted research (Adams & Plaut, 2003). These features of everyday life suggest a normative construction of social relations that one might refer to as “prevention-oriented relationality” characterized by avoidance of such painful outcomes as rejection or conflict (see Gable, 2006; Gable & Impett, 2012; see also Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2013; Higgins, 1987; 1996). Within these West African settings, this orientation finds expression in tendencies for people to report a relatively small number of friends (Adams & Plaut, 2003); to be vigilant for attacks from personal enemies in the context of “close” relationships (Adams, 2005); to emphasize silence and concealment rather than expressive disclosure and revelation in intimate spaces (e.g., Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2000; see also Taylor et al., 2004); and to focus on careful management of obligations for material care (Coe, 2011) or shared participation in everyday concerns as the basis of social support (Adams & Plaut, 2003; see Mesquita, 2001).

The implicit contrast is the more “promotion-oriented relationality” that constitutes a normative construction of social relations in North American settings. This orientation valorizes the relatively uninhibited pursuit of such pleasurable outcomes as intimacy or growth (see Gable, 2006; Gable & Impett, 2012; see also Higgins, 1987; 1996). It finds expression in tendencies for people to report a large number of friends (Adams & Plaut, 2003) and social interactions (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989); to report a sense of freedom from enemies (Adams, 2005) and high levels of general trust (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994); to emphasize self-disclosure as a tool for production of intimacy (e.g., Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992); and to regard verbally
oriented, emotional understanding as the essence of social support (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Mesquita, 2001).

In this way, comparative research in West African and North American settings has highlighted broad differences in goal orientations that cohere across a wide range of relationship phenomena. We use prevention-oriented relationality to refer to a constellation of tendencies that emphasize fulfillment of obligation and avoidance of disruption as strategies to maintain security within existing connections. These prevention-oriented tendencies include an emphasis on material support, vigilant concern about preventing harm from possible enemies, and caution about friendship. Conversely, we use promotion-oriented relationality to refer to a constellation of tendencies that emphasize emotional intimacy and pursuit of expansive happiness as strategies to enhance personal growth by creating more satisfying connections. These promotion-oriented tendencies include an emphasis on emotional support, a sense of freedom from concern about enemies, and an open approach to friendship.

**Theoretical Framework: The Cultural Psychology of Relationship**

In their original formulation, Adams and his colleagues located the source of these different patterns in implicit constructions of relationality by which people in different settings practice and experience interpersonal connection (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004). In particular, responses of participants in West African settings linked a cautious approach to friendship, concern about enemies, and other prevention-oriented patterns to cultural realities of embedded interdependence (Adams, 2005). These everyday realities afford both a sense of rootedness in context and an experience of relationality as ontologically prior connection in dense or overlapping networks constituted by mutual obligations of material support (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Salter & Adams, 2012). These everyday realities afford "thick" or "sticky" forms of relationality that
limit people's capacity to create connections or to insulate themselves from the interpersonal friction. Within these cultural realities of embedded interdependence, the prevention-oriented emphasis on careful management of existing ties is an optimal strategy to ensure everyday well-being (Hamamura & Heine, 2008; Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2013; Oishi & Kesebir, 2012).

In contrast, responses of participants in North American settings linked an open approach to friendship, minimal concern about enemies, and other promotion-oriented forms of relationality to cultural realities of *voluntaristic or abstracted independence* (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008). These everyday realities afford both a sense of separation from context and an experience of social connection as the tenuous creation of ontologically prior individuals (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004). Resonating with what Fiske (1991) called a *market pricing* (MP) model of relationship, these realities promote an experience of the social world as a relatively frictionless "free market" populated by unfettered "free agents" who are at liberty (and compelled) to arrange their own connections. They afford the sense of possibility not only to construct a broad network of friends, but also to avoid negative consequences of connection (including personal enemies). Within these cultural realities of abstracted independence, the promotion-oriented emphasis on expansion and open pursuit of pleasurable ties is an optimal strategy to enhance well-being (Hamamura & Heine, 2008; Oishi & Kesebir, 2012).

**Ecological Intersections: Relational Mobility**

In their original formulation, Adams and his colleagues (2004) referred to “implicit constructions of relationship” in a manner consistent with an ecological (versus entity) conception of culture as “explicit and implicit patterns of historically derived and selected ideas” and the “material manifestations [of these ideas] in institutions, practices, and artifacts” (Adams
& Markus, 2004; p. 11). In other words, they used “implicit constructions” to refer to both person-inscribed patterns of mind-in-brain associated with different understandings of relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and ecologically inscribed patterns of “mind in society” (Vygotsky, 1978) that afford and constrain different experiences of relationship (Barker, 1968; Cole, 1995).

This ecological conception of culture provides a point of contact with the renewed interest in ecological perspectives across the field of social psychology. Although a broad review is beyond the scope of the present work (see Oishi & Graham, 2010, for a review), a recurring theme of this work has been the impact of mobility on psychological experience (e.g., Chen, Chiu, & Chan, 2009; Oishi, 2010; Yamagishi, Hashimoto, Li, & Schug, 2012; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Particularly relevant for the present work is the idea of relational mobility: the extent to which local realities afford opportunities to meet new people and choose new relationships (Yuki & Schug, 2012). This concept provides an explicit link between the experience of mobility and different constructions of relationship. Almost by definition, everyday settings that promote high relational mobility afford a “voluntaristic-independent” (Adams & Plaut, 2003) sense of freedom to pursue and choose satisfying connections, to disinvest in relationships that no longer satisfy, and other patterns of promotion-oriented relationality. Conversely, everyday settings that promote low relational mobility afford an embedded-interdependent sense of caution, avoidance of conflict, and other patterns of prevention-oriented relationality (also see Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2013; Yamagishi, Hashimoto, Li, & Schug, 2012).

Initial evidence for these ideas comes from research comparing relational mobility and tendencies of self-disclosure among students in Japan and the U.S. (Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010). Consistent with research on sociocultural differences at the level of national society, the
promotion-oriented pattern of greater willingness to self-disclose was more evident among U.S. than Japanese students. Consistent with research on sociocultural differences at the level of local ecology, the promotion-oriented pattern of greater willingness to self-disclose was positively associated with students’ perceptions about relational mobility in their local environment. Moreover, perceptions of relational mobility were greater among U.S. than Japanese students, and this difference in perceptions of relational mobility mediated corresponding differences in promotion-oriented tendencies of open self-disclosure.

Overview of the Current Research

The present research extends previous work on cultural-psychological foundations of relationship (e.g., Adams et al., 2004) in two important ways that make synergistic contact with research on relational mobility (e.g., Yuki & Schug, 2012). First, the present research extends the comparison of cautious intimacy in West African and North American settings to an East Asian setting (Hong Kong) which researchers have associated with varieties of (embedded) interdependence (e.g., Shen, Wan, & Wyer, 2011; Zou et al., 2009). Second, the present work extends previous research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationality by investigating the links between cautious intimacy and perceptions of relational mobility. The resonance between discussions of relationship constructions (e.g., Adams et al., 2004) and relational mobility (e.g., Yuki & Schug, 2012) suggests the hypothesis that promotion-oriented patterns of relationality—that is, an open approach to friendship, sense of freedom from concern about enemysip, and tendency to emphasize emotional over material aspects of support (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003)—will be positively associated with relational mobility. We tested this hypothesis with multiple methods across three studies.

Study 1
Study 1 tested the hypothesized relationship between promotion-oriented patterns of relationality and perceptions of relational mobility. In all three studies, we presented all measures in English, which is a language of instruction at all research sites.

**Method**

**Participants.** We recruited 93 students (40 men, 53 women; $M_{age} = 20.72$, $SD = 2.02$), all of whom were born in Hong Kong, from a university in Hong Kong.

**Procedure.** Participants responded to items in an online survey using a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

The survey included the 12-item Relational Mobility Scale (RMob; Yuki et al., 2007; e.g., “For the most part, people are able to choose those who they interact with”; $\alpha = .70$). High scores indicate that people perceive greater relational mobility—that is, meeting new people, choosing connections, and creating relationships—in their local environment.

The survey also included measures that we developed to assess distinct, but conceptually related, components of relationality. Our primary outcome was a 7-item measure of *caution about friends* (e.g., “A person who is a friend today might become an enemy tomorrow”; see Appendix A). We computed the mean of these items to create a composite indicator of the cautious approach to friendship associated with prevention-oriented relationality ($\alpha = .83$).

Besides the primary outcome of caution about friends, we also included briefer, more exploratory measures for two other components of relationality. First, we modified interview prompts from earlier work (Adams, 2005) to create two items that tapped concern about enemysip: “People who claim they do not have enemies are naïve” and “I am the target of enemies: that is, there are people who want my downfall and are trying to sabotage me”, $r(93) = .50, p < .001$. The mean of these items provided an indicator of the prominence of concern about
enemyship associated with prevention-oriented relationality. Second, we modified interview prompts from earlier work (Adams & Plaut, 2003) to create two items about social support in friendship: “I regard emotional support [practical or material assistance] as a defining feature of friendship.” The difference in responses to these items provided an indicator of the promotion-oriented tendency to emphasize emotional over material support in friendship.

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables appear in Table 1. Results revealed hypothesized relationships. Perceptions of relational mobility were negatively associated with caution about friendship, \( r(93) = -.47, p < .001 \); negatively associated with concern about enemyship, \( r(93) = -.29, p = .005 \); and positively associated with an emphasis on emotional intimacy over material support in friendship, \( r(93) = .25, p = .016 \).

Besides hypothesized associations, we also found gender differences on all variables such that patterns of promotion-oriented relationality were stronger among women than men. Specifically, women (\( M = 4.12, SD = .53 \)) scored higher than men (\( M = 3.86, SD = .42 \)) on the RMob scale, \( F(1, 91) = 6.56, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .07 \); and women (\( M = 1.23, SD = 1.22 \)) showed a greater tendency than men (\( M = 0.63, SD = .90 \)) to emphasize emotional rather than material aspects of social support, \( F(1, 91) = 6.91, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .07 \). Conversely, men (\( M = 3.64, SD = 1.23 \)) expressed stronger concern about enemyship than women did (\( M = 3.07, SD = 1.14 \), \( F(1, 91) = 5.33, p = .02, \eta^2_p = .06 \)); and men (\( M = 3.36, SD = .79 \)) tended to express greater caution about friendship than women did (\( M = 3.05, SD = .90 \), \( F(1, 91) = 3.14, p = .08, \eta^2_p = .03 \). Gender did not moderate associations between RMob scores and dependent variables. For this reason, and because we did not observe these effects consistently across Studies 2 and 3, we do not
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attempt to interpret them here. However, the pattern does have interesting theoretical implications that we consider in the General Discussion section.

Previous work has established that R Mob scores predict tendencies of self-disclosure (Schug et al., 2010) and the relationship of similarity and attraction in friendship (Schug, Yuki, Horikawa, & Takemura, 2009), both of which are specific manifestations of general patterns that we refer to as promotion-oriented relationality (see Adams, Kurtiș, Salter, & Anderson, 2012). The present study extends research by demonstrating a link between R Mob scores and other patterns of promotion-oriented relationality: an open (i.e., less cautious) approach to friendship, a sense of freedom from concern about enemiship, and an emphasis on emotional rather than material aspects of social support.

Study 2

Results of Study 1 confirm an association between perceptions of relational mobility and promotion-oriented patterns of relationality. Study 2 considers whether this association can explain differences across cultural settings (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003). We administered the same instruments as in Study 1 to samples of students from universities in Hong Kong and the U.S. Extending previous comparisons of participants in North American and East Asian contexts (e.g., Schug et al., 2009; 2010), we anticipated that students in the U.S. setting would show greater tendencies toward promotion-oriented relationality than would participants in a Hong Kong setting. The guiding hypothesis of the study is that perception of relational mobility, measured by scores on the R Mob scale, will account for observed differences in relationship tendencies. This implies that (a) R Mob scores will be significantly correlated with relationship tendencies (as in Study 1), (b) R Mob scores will be greater among participants in the
US setting than the Hong Kong setting, and (c) the difference in RMob scores will mediate differences in relationship tendencies across settings.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants were 165 students (71 men, 80 women, and 14 who did not report gender; $M_{age} = 20.05$, $SD = 1.40$) from a university in Hong Kong and 178 students (86 men, 75 women, and 17 who did not report gender; $M_{age} = 19.30$, $SD = 1.61$) from a university in the U.S.

**Procedure.** Participants completed the same online survey as in Study 1, including measures of RMob (Hong Kong: $\alpha = .77$, US: $\alpha = .80$), caution about friends (Hong Kong: $\alpha = .75$, US: $\alpha = .74$), concern about enemyship experience (Hong Kong: $r(165) = .18$, $p = .02$; US: $r(170) = .26$, $p = .001$), and emphasis on emotional support.

**Results and Discussion**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables appear in Table 2. Results again reveal broad support for hypotheses.

**Differences across settings.** We conducted 2 (Setting) x 2 (Gender) ANOVAs to test for hypothesized differences across cultural settings. Results revealed the hypothesized effect of cultural setting on relational mobility, $F(1,308) = 64.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .17$, such that RMob scores were higher in the US ($M = 4.53$, $SD = .65$) than Hong Kong setting ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .58$). A marginally significant effect of gender, $F(1,308) = 3.46$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, suggested that Rmob scores were higher among women ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .71$) than men ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .64$). The interaction was not significant, $F < 1$, $p = .81$.

Results revealed the hypothesized effect of cultural setting on caution about friendship such that caution scores were greater among participants in the Hong Kong ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .76$)
than the U.S. setting ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .76$), $F(1,308) = 75.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$. The main effect of gender and its interaction with cultural setting were not significant, $Fs < 1$, $ps > .47$.

Results revealed the hypothesized effect of cultural setting on concern about enemyship, such that concern about enemyship was higher among participants in the Hong Kong ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.02$) than the U.S. setting ($M = 2.87$, $SD = .97$), $F(1,308) = 25.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. Results also revealed a main effect of gender, such that concern about enemyship was higher among men ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.02$) than women ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.04$), $F(1,308) = 4.72$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The Setting x Gender interaction did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, $F(1,308) = 3.39$, $p = .07^1$.

Finally, results revealed only a main effect of gender such that the emphasis on emotional over material support was greater among women ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 1.77$) than men ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 1.75$), $F(1,308) = 7.79$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Neither the effect of cultural setting nor its interaction with gender were significant, $Fs < 2$, $ps > .31$.

**Mediation analysis.** We next tested the hypothesis that observed differences in perceptions of relational mobility would account for (i.e., mediate) observed differences in relational orientations across settings. In particular, we tested this hypothesis for the relationship tendencies, caution about friends and concern about enemyship, for which we observed differences across settings; we did not observe a difference across settings in valorization of emotional support, so we did not test the mediation hypothesis for this outcome. Mediation analyses with 5,000 bootstrapping resamples using the procedure of Preacher and Hayes (2008) revealed that the indirect effect of cultural setting on relationship tendencies through its effect on RMob scores was significant for both caution about friends and concern about enemyship. A summary of these analyses appears in Figure 1.
Summary. Results of Study 2 extend research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationality in 2 ways. First, we replicated patterns of cultural differences in friendship and concern about enemypship (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003) in a comparison of North American and East Asian (Hong Kong) settings. Second, we observed support for the hypothesis linking differences in relationality across settings to corresponding differences in perception of relational mobility.

Study 3

The hypothesis that perceptions of relational mobility mediate cultural differences in relationship tendencies implies the hypothesis that different perceptions of relational mobility can elicit different relationship tendencies. In Study 3, we conducted an experiment to test this hypothesis in more explicit fashion.

Method

Participants. Participants were 55 students (24 men, 27 women, and 1 who did not report gender; $M_{age} = 20.67$, $SD = 2.07$) from a university in Hong Kong. All of participants were born in Hong Kong.

Procedure and Materials. Participants arrived in groups of 5 to 10. The experimenter led each participant to an individual workstation to complete all procedures. Participants read a brief passage about a company that we portrayed as either high or low in relational mobility (see Appendix B; cf. Chen et al., 2009; Oishi, Miao, Koo, Kisling, & Ratliff, 2012; Yuki, Sato, Takemura, & Oishi, 2013). Participants had 10 minutes to imagine working for the company and to write about the relationships they would have with their coworkers. After the writing task, participants completed the same measures of caution about friends ($\alpha = .70$), concern about enemypship ($r(52) = .12, p = .38$), and emphasis on emotional support.
Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis, we conducted 2 (Condition: stable vs. mobile) x 2 (Gender: male vs. female) ANOVAs on outcomes of interest. Results for the primary outcome of caution about friendship showed only the hypothesized, main effect of condition, $F(1,47) = 5.13, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .10$. Participants in the high mobility condition ($M = 2.91, SD = .59$) reported less caution about friends than did those in the low mobility condition ($M = 3.32, SD = .60$). The main effect of gender and its interaction with condition were not significant, $Fs < 1, ps > .36$.

In contrast to results for caution about friends, results revealed no effects for concern about enemyship, $Fs < 2, ps > .23$. A plausible explanation for this pattern concerns the relative sensitivity of different items to experimental manipulation. Definitive statements about enemyship concern are presumably less open to experimental manipulation than are more fluid judgments about the advisability of caution in intimate relations. If so, then it is not surprising that we observed effects of the relational mobility manipulation for our seven-item measure of fluid beliefs about friendship but not for our two-item measure of concern about enemyship. Although plausible, a definitive test of this speculation awaits future research.

Similarly, results revealed no main effects on the measure of social support, $Fs < 3, ps > .10$. Instead, the Condition x Gender interaction was significant, $F(1,47) = 4.24, p = .05, \eta_p^2 = .08$. To decompose the interaction, we examined the simple effect of condition within gender. The hypothesized effect of the manipulation was significant among women, $F(1,25) = 9.61, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .28$, such that the emphasis on emotional over material support was greater in the high mobility ($M = 2.50, SD = 1.41$) than the low mobility condition ($M = .91, SD = 1.14$). The effect of the manipulation was not significant among men, $F < 1, p > .67$. 
A speculative explanation for this interaction pattern may be broader gender differences in responsiveness to situational variation. Theory and research suggest that a defining feature of independent constructions of self is an abstraction of experience from social context and corresponding insensitivity to situational variation relative to more interdependent constructions (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Suh, 2002). If affordances for independence are more prominent among men than women (e.g., Markus & Oyserman, 1989), then the associated insensitivity to situational variation may make men less responsive (than women) to experimental manipulation. Alternatively, the pattern of results may reflect gender differences not in sensitivity to experimental manipulation, but instead in flexibility of the response domain. That is, response repertoires for valorization of emotional support may be more flexible—and therefore more responsive to experimental manipulation—among women than among men.

Again, a definitive test of these possibilities awaits future research. In the meantime, we emphasize that the experimental manipulation of relational mobility did produce hypothesized effects on our primary measure of caution about friendship. Despite the relatively minimalist character of (or participant insensitivities to) the experimental manipulation, participants who imagined a high mobility future expressed less caution about friendship than did participants who imagined a low mobility future.

Of course, as with any investigation, Study 3 is not without limitations. First, the sample was small, which raises questions about replicability that are best answered by conducting more research. Second, we did not include a control condition, so it is impossible to judge whether one or both conditions (low and high relational mobility) were the primary force of change in relationship tendencies.
Even so, the study adds to the growing body of literature which demonstrates that experimental manipulations of anticipated mobility can be sufficient to produce differences in psychological outcomes that correlational research has associated with different affordances for mobility (cf. Chen et al., 2009; Oishi, et al., 2012; Yuki et al., 2013). Previous work has applied correlational techniques (including quasi-experimental comparisons across contexts) to document a link between measures of relational mobility and relationship tendencies (e.g. Schug et al., 2009; 2010). Extending previous research, the present study applies experimental techniques to document a causal link between perceptions of relational mobility and relationship tendencies. Specifically, results support the hypothesis that a temporary manipulation of perceptions of relational mobility can be sufficient to produce hypothesized differences in caution about friendship that parallel both the differences across context that we observed in Study 2 and the associations with RMob that we observed in Studies 1 and 2.

**General Discussion**

The guiding hypothesis of this research is that the promotion-oriented relationality that constitutes the normative standard of psychological science is not a just-natural baseline, but instead reflects affordances for what Yuki and his colleagues (e.g., Yuki et al., 2007) have called relational mobility. Support for the hypothesis was greatest for our primary outcome of interest: caution about friendship. Whether as an experimental treatment (Study 3) or measured variable (Studies 1 and 2), the perception of relational mobility was negatively related to caution about friends, and this negative relationship mediated hypothesized differences in caution about friendship between Hong Kong and U.S. settings (Study 2).

Besides the primary outcome of caution about friendship, support for the hypothesis was also evident for concern about enmyship. Perceptions of relational mobility were negatively
related to enemship concern (Studies 1 and 2), and this negative relationship mediated hypothesized differences in enemship concern between Hong Kong and U.S. settings (Study 2). However, our experimental manipulation of perceptions about relational mobility did not produce parallel effects on enemship concern (Study 3). As we noted, a speculative explanation for this pattern is that definitive statements about enemship concern may be less sensitive to experimental manipulation than more fluidly constructed judgments about caution in friendship.

Support for the hypothesis was weakest for valorization of emotional (versus material) support. On one hand, valorization of emotional support did not vary across cultural settings in the same manner as caution about friends and concern about enemship (Study 2). Moreover, our relational mobility treatment produced effects on valorization of emotional support only among women, but not among men (Study 3). On the other hand, we did observe the hypothesized relationship between measured perceptions of relational mobility and valorization of emotional support in Study 1. Moreover, we replicated this pattern within both Hong Kong and US samples in Study 2.

In summary, results provide consistent support for the hypothesis that the perception of relational mobility is negatively associated with a cautious approach to friendship. In addition, results provide some support for the hypothesis that the perception of relational mobility is associated with a broader tendency of promotion-oriented relationality that includes a sense of freedom from enemship and valorization of emotional over material support. Variation in consistency of results across these latter measures (especially in response to experimental manipulation) is a limitation of the present work that provides fertile ground for further work. Without downplaying this limitation, we turn attention to the implications of the present work for theory and research.
Perspectives on Interdependence and Relationality

Besides evidence for the hypothesized association of relationship experience with relational mobility, results revealed inconsistent patterns of gender differences. Replicating well-established patterns (e.g., Burda, Vaux, & Schill, 1984; Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994), we observed in all three studies that valorization of emotional (relative to material) support was greater among women than men, although this gender difference was evident in Study 3 only among participants in the high-mobility condition. We also observed gender differences in relational mobility, such that RMob scores were higher for women than men in both Studies 1 and 2. Finally, men scored higher than women on measures of caution about friends (Study 1, but not Studies 2 and 3) and enemysthip concern (Studies 1 and 2, but not Study 3). Although one must exercise caution about interpretation of these results given their inconsistency across studies, the general pattern suggests that women perceived greater relational mobility and indicated stronger tendencies of promotion-oriented relationality than did men.

This pattern exposes inconsistencies in theoretical understandings of interdependence and relationality across dimensions of cultural setting and gendered difference. Research on gender differences reveals that women tend to show more promotion-oriented patterns of disclosure and emotional support than men, and it explains this by referring to women’s greater interdependence (Cross & Madson, 1997). In contrast, the theoretical framework that underlies the present studies derives from comparisons across cultural settings that associate interdependent selfways with prevention-oriented patterns of caution and material care rather than promotion-oriented patterns of disclosure and emotional care. The question then arises: is interdependence related to prevention-oriented patterns of relationality (as a cultural psychological framework suggests) or promotion-oriented patterns of relationality (as research on gender differences suggests)? As a
preliminary answer to this question, the present work suggests that “interdependence”—in the form of affordances for relational embeddedness versus relational mobility—is associated with prevention-oriented forms of relationality.

How does one square this conclusion with research derived from theoretical perspectives on gender that associate women’s “interdependence” with promotion-oriented relationality? A clue comes from discussions in historical sociology that link the valorization of promotion-oriented relationality evident in contemporary North American settings to the relatively recent rise of affective individualism: constructions of self characterized not only by abstracted independence and relational mobility, but also a value emphasis on exploration and expression of personal feelings (Bellah et al., 1985; Giddens, 1991; Oliker, 1998). If this account is correct, then women’s greater tendencies toward promotion-oriented relationality evident in the present studies and other research may indeed be a manifestation of “interdependence”, understood specifically in terms of socio-emotional values. However, this increased focus on “interdependence” in the sense of socio-emotional values may ironically be a consequence of “independence” in the sense of relational mobility. Although definitive evidence for this account awaits future research, an important contribution of the present studies is to illuminate these theoretical issues for deeper consideration.

**Affordances for Regulatory Focus.**

In his foundational articulations, Higgins (1987; 1996) discussed features of early childhood environments that afford different forms of regulatory focus.

[C]hildren socialized by bolstering and love-withdrawal modes of caretaker-child interaction are likely to acquire a promotion focus in which survival in the world means attaining accomplishments and fulfilling aspirations. In contrast, children socialized by
some combination of prudent and punitive/critical modes of caretaker-child interaction are likely to acquire a prevention focus in which survival in the world means attaining safety and meeting obligations (Higgins, 1996; p. 1066).

Subsequent research has illuminated variation in regulatory focus, linking prevention orientation with realities of embedded interdependence and promotion-orientation with realities of abstracted independence (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya, & Hori, 2009; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Extending this work, we proposed, tested, and observed that the perception of relational mobility (and its flipside, embedded interdependence) fosters promotion-oriented (and prevention-oriented) forms of relationality.

This bridge between research areas suggests directions for additional research on affordances for variation in regulatory focus beyond differences in relational orientation. For example, one might examine variation in promotion and prevention motivations as a function of measured or manipulated differences in perceptions of relational mobility (e.g., Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya, & Hori, 2009).

**Conclusion: Bridging Cultural and Ecological Perspectives**

A similar conceptual bridge is implicit in our intersection of cultural-psychological and social-ecological perspectives. Other work has fruitfully elaborated the distinction between cultural-psychological and social-ecological approaches to call for renewed attention to ecological perspectives on psychological science (e.g., Oishi & Graham, 2010). In the present work, we have taken inspiration from an ecologically oriented understanding of culture to emphasize a point of contact between (a) work that locates the cultural grounding of personal relationship in affordances for embedded interdependence and voluntaristic independence (Adams et al., 2004) and (b) work that associates contextual variation in relationship tendencies with relational mobility (Schug et al.,
2009, 2010; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Again, the bridge between research areas suggests directions for research that investigates variation in relational mobility and its consequences for variation in psychological tendencies that previous research has examined within a cultural psychology framework. For example, one might examine variation in self-enhancement tendencies (e.g., Falk, Heine, Yuki, & Takemura, 2009) or the association between self-esteem and happiness (Yuki et al., 2013) as a function of measured or manipulated differences in perceptions of relational mobility. We offer this paper as a contribution toward such theoretical integration.
Note

A probe of this interaction indicated that the simple effect of gender was significant only among Hong Kong participants, $F(1, 149) = 7.64, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .05$, where reports of enemyship concern were stronger among men ($M = 3.65, SD = .93$) than women ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.05$). There was no gender difference in reports of enemyship concern among American participants, $F<1, p = .81$. 
References


In I. Karp & D. A. Masolo (Eds.), *African philosophy as cultural inquiry* (pp. 25-49). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.


Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations in Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Relation mobility</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.47***</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Caution about friendship</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.69***</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enemyship experience</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emphasis on Emotional Support</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001
Table 2

*Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations in Study 2.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hong Kong</th>
<th>US</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Relational mobility</td>
<td>3.97_a</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Caution about friendship</td>
<td>3.13_a</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Enemyship experience</td>
<td>3.42_a</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emphasis on Emotional Support</td>
<td>1.60_a</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Different subscripts within each row indicate a significant cultural difference at $p < .05$. Correlations above and below the diagonal are for US and Hong Kong Chinese participants, respectively.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
A

Relational mobility

\[ a = .56^{***} \]

Cultural background
(0: Hong Kong Chinese
1: Americans)

Caution about friendship

\[ b = -.47^{***} \]

\[ c = -.75^{***} \]

\[ c' = -.49^{***} \]

(95% confidence interval: -.36, -.18)

B

Relational mobility

\[ a = .56^{***} \]

Cultural background
(0: Hong Kong Chinese
1: Americans)

Enemyship experiences

\[ b = -.26^{**} \]

\[ c = -.56^{***} \]

\[ c' = -.47^{***} \]

(95% confidence interval: -.25, -.05)

**Figure 1.** The figures depict the analyses of the indirect effect of relational mobility on the cultural difference in: (a) cautions about friendship; (b) enemyship experiences. The values we report are unstandardized coefficients; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The results indicated the relational mobility partially mediated the cultural difference in a) cautions about friendship and b) enemyship experience.
Appendix A

Items for measuring the tendency of keeping cautions about friends

1. A person who is a friend today might become an enemy tomorrow.

2. There are likely to be people in my close social network (relatives and friends) who feel hatred and ill will toward me.

3. I am likely to have acquaintances (outside my close social network) who feel hatred and ill will toward me.

4. Within my close social network, it is difficult to know who is a true friend and who might become an enemy.

5. When people treat me well, it is difficult to know whether they do so because of personal affection or because of social expectations.

6. In general, my friends wish that good things happen to me and are happy about my happiness.
   (reverse item)

7. It is possible that my friends do not wish me success and take pleasure from my failure.
Appendix B

Materials for manipulation in Study 3

The situation for high relational mobility condition was,

Imagine that you are offered a job that you have always wanted. The job is with a huge, multi-department company housed in large campuses in several different locations. The company has a fluid, project-based organizational structure in which employees come together on temporary teams to work on particular projects. The teams dissolve once the project is complete and recombine in different configurations for the next set of projects. In other words, employees work on non-overlapping teams that change membership frequently, and they have frequent opportunities to meet and work with different members of the organization.

The situation for low relational mobility condition was,

Imagine that you are offered a job that you have always wanted. The job is with a small company housed in a single facility. The company has a stable workforce and organizational structure in which employees work together as an interconnected unit for an extended period of time across a number of different projects. Turnover is low, and employees work with the same, small set of people in slightly different configurations depending on the project. In other words, employees are linked to each other in a dense network with overlapping ties, and they have frequent opportunities to interact with the same set of coworkers.