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Nonconscious relationship reactance: When significant others prime opposing goals

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Abstract

Individuals nonconsciously and unintentionally pursue goals they associate with relationship partners (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). Here, we demonstrate conditions under which individuals nonconsciously and unintentionally reject goals they associate with relationship partners and instead pursue opposing goals. In Experiment 1, participants were subliminally primed with the name of a controlling significant other who had a particular goal for them. Without awareness or intent, participants pursued a goal that directly opposed their significant other's wishes. In Experiment 2, chronic reactance was shown to moderate this effect: Low-reactant individuals adopted a subliminally primed significant other's goal, whereas high-reactant individuals pursued an opposing goal. This research suggests that in response to controlling significant others and among chronically reactant individuals, the nonconscious activation of relational representations can automatically elicit oppositional goal pursuits, even when pursuit of an oppositional goal results in a personally suboptimal outcome.

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Introduction

Social influence is so powerful that people in our lives need not be physically present to exert a significant influence on us (e.g., Bowlby, 1969). A social cognitive interpretation of this effect posits that the strong influence of mere psychological presence is enabled by the fact that our relationship partners are represented cognitively in so-called *relational schemas* (Baldwin, 1992; Planalp, 1987). Relational schemas are elaborated on over repeated interactions with a relationship partner and are thought to consist of information about the self, the other, and the relationship. According to this view, the information contained within relational schemas—which can be cognitive, affective, or motivational—is represented in memory in an associative network (also see Anderson & Chen, 2002). Activation of one component of this network

will lead to activation of other components that have been frequently and consistently associated with it in the past. So, for instance, if a mother consistently desires that her son work hard, and her son is aware of his mother's desire, then over time, the association between his mother and the construct of working hard becomes a part of his relational schema for his mother. Merely thinking about his mother comes to have a striking effect on how hard he works to work hard, and thereby his mother can exert an influence on him even in her physical absence.

Automatic activation of goals by significant others

Even more provocative is that significant others exert an influence even when their psychological presence is not consciously recognized by the individual. This effect has been demonstrated in studies that have activated significant other representations below the threshold of consciousness and shown that in the absence of awareness and intent,

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such activation can have consequences for perceptions of self and others (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; Glassman & Anderson, 1999), affect (Anderson, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996), and overt behaviors (Berk & Andersen, 2000; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). How is it that cognitive representations of significant others nonconsciously and unintentionally trigger changes in overt behaviors? One possible mechanism of social influence on behavior is goal related (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Moretti & Higgins, 1999; Shah, 2003). This view draws on two sources: (1) research showing that we internalize and pursue goals that arise from external sources (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Higgins, 1999) and (2) research demonstrating that goals—which we often think of as consciously chosen and intentionally pursued—can be activated by features of the environment and pursued without conscious awareness and intent (Bargh, 1990; for a review, see Chartrand, Dalton, & Cheng, *in press*). According to this view, the activation of a significant other representation will activate associated goal representations in the relational schema. As a result, exposure to a significant other can influence one's goals and subsequent behavior without the individual's awareness. Returning to the example of a son whose mother has a goal for him to work hard, the notion is that perceiving cues that relate to mother (e.g., hearing mother's voice or reading mother's name) can automatically activate the goal to work hard, thereby causing the son to work harder on the task he is performing without any conscious deliberation about his mother.

Two recent empirical investigations demonstrate that unobtrusively activating relational schemas can put associated goals into operation automatically (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003) found that activating relational schemas leads to automatic activation and pursuit of interpersonal goals, which are goals that individuals typically pursue in the presence of significant others. In one study, participants were more likely to volunteer for a second study if they were first asked to volunteer to complete a questionnaire about a friend than one about a coworker. The investigators attributed this effect to the activation of an interpersonal helping goal: thinking about a friend activated the goal to be helpful to others more readily than did thinking about a coworker.

Shah (2003) examined goals that individuals' significant others have for them and found that they too can be automatically activated and pursued. Participants subliminally primed with the name of a significant other who had a goal for the participant to do well persisted longer and performed better on a series of anagrams than those primed with a significant other who did not have this goal for the participant. These effects were moderated by the importance of the task goal to the participants' significant other and the participants' closeness to their significant other. Shah (2003) concluded that activating representations of close others leads individuals to pursue the goals those close others most want them to pursue. Like the research

of Fitzsimons and Bargh (2003), Shah's research shows that invoking mental representations of significant others can have automatic behavioral effects.

It is likely that associations between significant others and goals serve us well in our day to day lives by instigating socially desirable and adaptive behaviors. Scholars have begun to recognize the importance of studying such associations, particularly those that come to operate outside of conscious awareness and control. However, the few empirical investigations of these automatic associations present an overly simplistic view of the associative networks characterizing our relational schemas. For instance, how one responds to a significant other's goal might depend not only on the strength of the association between the significant other and the goal, but also on other aspects of the relational representation (cf. Shah, 2003). The boy's adoption of his mother's goal for him to work hard might depend on how he experiences it—does it reflect her desire to encourage him or her desire to control him? If he perceives her as a source of encouragement, he may pursue the goal she has for him. If, however, he perceives his mother to be a threat to his personal freedom, he may react against her wishes. In this case, does the boy adopt the goal his mother has for him, or does he instead adopt an opposing goal, even at a nonconscious and unintentional level?

The case for nonconscious reactance

Despite the importance of preserving social relationships and the strength of social influence in general (e.g., Milgram, 1963; Rosenthal, 1985), sometimes individuals feel compelled to behave in opposition to social influences. For instance, interest in viewing violent entertainment is increased by reading labels that warn of violent content (Bushman & Stack, 1996), and choice of unhealthy food products is increased after reading recommendations for healthier alternative brands (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004). These particular social circumstances motivate individuals to behave in oppositional ways because they are perceived by individuals as threats to autonomy. The motivational state to maintain or acquire freedom and the resulting behavior have been labeled *reactance* (Brehm, 1966, 1989; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Whortman & Brehm, 1975; Wicklund, 1974). Reactance can have particularly severe ramifications in high-stakes situations and among individuals with more reactant tendencies. For example, individual measures of reactance are negatively correlated with improvement in a therapy situation and positively correlated with early termination of therapy (Seibel & Dowd, 1999). Moreover, reactance in disturbed adolescents is associated with oppositional, nonaffiliative, and narcissistic traits, longer hospital stays, aggression, mood problems, and substance abuse (Frank et al., 1998).

Few researchers have commented on the role of consciousness in reactance. According to Brehm (1989), the perception that one's autonomy is threatened leads individ-

uals to make a number of generalizations and assumptions about what their threatened freedom means. Specifically, when individuals perceive a threat to one particular freedom, this threat can be perceived as a threat to other freedoms of similar or less importance, or as a threat to the same freedom in the future. Brehm's position implies that the reactant response is at least partially consciously guided in that it is this cognitive elaboration on the perception of threat that gives potency to reactance. Kray, Thompson and Galinsky (2001; also see Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004) reported that implicitly activated gender stereotypes lead to stereotype-congruent behavior, while explicitly activated gender stereotypes result in stereotype-incongruent behavior. Based on these findings, they argued that environmental stimuli must be consciously perceived in order to trigger an oppositional response. But could there exist a form of entirely automatic reactance? That is, can individuals experience reactance against a social influence and engage in a behavioral backlash without consciously making any generalizations and assumptions, and without even consciously perceiving the reactance-evoking stimulus, or does reactance necessarily require some level of conscious awareness?

Although in some instances reactance probably is a conscious experience, we reason that the motivational state of reactance is not unlike other motivational states: the frequency and consistency with which one has experienced it in a particular situation will determine whether it can be activated and guide behavior without conscious awareness or intention. In the context of interpersonal relationships, we conjecture that individuals who have habitually experienced the state of reactance while interacting with a significant other will come to have this motivational state chronically accessible in the relevant relational schema (cf. Murray, Bellavia, Feeney, Holmes, & Rose, 2001). This suggests that nonconscious activation of a relational schema should produce automatic responses that mirror their conscious counterparts insofar as these responses can "go beyond what is subliminally primed" (Glassman & Anderson, 1999). Consequently, these individuals will come to have reactance automatically evoked upon exposure to the significant other.

Following from this view, we hypothesize that whether or not individuals automatically assimilate to their significant others' wishes or contrast away from these wishes will depend on whether or not they perceive their significant others as threats to their personal freedom. The most compelling evidence that reactance can occur nonconsciously would be a demonstration of reactance among individuals who do not consciously perceive the reactance-provoking stimulus at all. Therefore, we test our hypothesis in two experiments using subliminal priming techniques to activate relational schemas below the radar of conscious perception. We demonstrate that subliminally priming idiosyncratic stimuli can trigger reactance in individuals who associate the prime with threatened freedoms.

Experiment 1

Experiment 1 is a preliminary investigation of whether nonconscious exposure to the name of a significant other can evoke reactance and result in behavior that is the opposite of that which the significant other wishes. Based on studies showing assimilation to significant other primes (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003), we are predicting a counterintuitive pattern of results. Therefore, information that was relevant to demonstrating nonconscious relationship reactance was collected and used as selection criteria for the main experiment. In the main experiment, participants would be primed with the name of a significant other who was highly controlling and highly associated with either the goal to work hard or the goal to have fun. Therefore, to enable random assignment to experimental conditions, we selected only those participants who reported that both the significant other associated with the goal to work hard and the significant other associated with the goal to have fun were highly controlling. Second, to bolster the notion that the effect is not consciously mediated, we selected only those participants who also reported that these same significant others were strong triggers of their respective goals. This created dissociation between the predicted responses driven by conscious processes (participants should adopt the significant other's goal) compared to nonconscious reactance (participants should pursue an opposing goal). Participants were primed with the name of a significant other who was highly controlling and highly associated either with the goal to "work hard" or with the goal to "have fun." Reactance against a goal to work hard would be reflected by poor performance on an academic task, whereas reactance against a goal to have fun would be reflected by relatively superior performance on an academic task.

Methods

Participants

Twenty-four male and female introductory psychology students at a large, public, Midwestern University participated for course credit. Due to a computer malfunction, two participants' data were lost, leaving 22 participants' data to be analyzed.

Procedure

During a mass testing session at the beginning of the semester, approximately 800 introductory psychology students completed a significant others questionnaire. In it, they indicated the first names of the people who most want them to work hard, have fun, and 8 other goals (included to mask the questionnaire's true purpose). After listing the name, they indicated how much the person triggers that motive or emotion in them on a 7-point scale, from "triggers it a little bit" to "triggers it very much," and how much the person wants to control their lives, also on a 7-point scale, from "not at all" to "very much."

Students were later recruited for the main experiment based on three criteria. The student must have listed different people for the goals to work hard and to have fun. Also, in reference to both the person associated with the goal to work hard and the person associated with the goal to have fun, the student must have provided ratings within the upper quartile of responses to the questions, “how much does that person trigger that motive or emotion in you?” and “how much does that person want to control you?”

When they arrived for the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to be primed with the name of the significant other who wanted them to work hard (work hard condition) or have fun (have fun condition). Under the guise of a “visual acuity task”, participants were subliminally primed parafoveally across 75 trials with the name of the relevant significant other. Each trial consisted of a fixation stimulus (3 asterisks), prime stimulus (name of significant other), and backward mask (8-letter nonsense word). Stimuli were presented in 16-point Arial font. The fixation stimulus appeared in the center of the screen for 2–7 s. Then in one quadrant, the prime stimulus and backward mask appeared consecutively for 60 ms each. Participants were seated so that the primes appeared at a 45° visual angle. Instructions were to attend to the asterisks at the center of the screen and to respond to flashes on the right or left by pressing the “j” or “f” key, respectively (see Chartrand & Bargh, 1996).

Next, participants completed a self-paced anagram task with 17 items of varied difficulty. Instructions were to work as quickly and accurately as possible and to attempt to complete each item. Participants then completed a funneled debriefing questionnaire containing increasingly specific questions that were designed to probe for suspicions about the experimental procedures and their purposes (see Bargh & Chartrand, 2000). For example, participants were asked what they thought the experiment was about, whether any part of the experiment seemed strange or suspicious, and what they thought the flashes were. They were also asked if they experienced any difficulty or conflict in generating which significant others they associated with the goals to work hard and relax.

Results and discussion

Funneled debriefing

No participant indicated difficulty generating names, or awareness of the hypothesis or of the relation between the different tasks of the experiment. In addition, no participant suspected that names were presented in the priming task. These findings suggest that any influence of the primes on behavior was a nonconscious one.

Performance data

Data were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA with prime condition (work hard versus have fun) as the between-subjects variable and number of correctly solved

anagrams as the dependent variable. The results showed that participants primed with the name of a controlling significant other who wanted them to work hard answered fewer anagrams correctly ($M = 8.16$) compared to participants primed with a controlling significant other who wanted them to have fun ($M = 10.70$), $F(1, 20) = 6.05$, $p = .02$. These results suggest that for individuals who perceive a significant other to be highly controlling, subliminally priming the name of that significant other causes these individuals to automatically do the opposite of that which the significant other wishes. This finding supports our hypothesis that relationship reactance can occur nonconsciously and unintentionally in response to significant other primes.

Experiment 2

Experiment 1 provided initial support for the hypothesis that people nonconsciously react against the wishes of controlling significant others. Experiment 2 was designed to provide stronger support for this claim. First, we examined a different source of reactance. We reasoned that peoples’ perceptions that their relationship partners are controlling might often be related to a more habitual tendency to believe that people in general wish to control them. Thus, rather than measuring the extent to which individuals perceive particular significant others as controlling, we measured trait reactance (Hong, 1992). Because we sought to examine the role of trait reactance as a moderator of the influence of significant other primes on goal-directed behavior, we included participants who expressed reactant tendencies to varying degrees. We expected low reactant participants to show goal-assimilation in response to a significant other prime (also see Shah, 2003). Conversely, we expected high reactant participants to show goal-contrast in response to a significant other prime.

To more clearly support our assertion that reactance is characterized by the pursuit of a goal in opposition to the wishes of the significant other, we used “relax” as the opposing goal for “work hard,” rather than “have fun.” For some individuals, having fun might include working hard, but relaxing does not have this characteristic, making it a more precise opposing goal. Experiment 2 also included a control group, which was primed with a string of letters instead of the name of a significant other. Finally, we modified the anagrams task to be more suitable for the different subject population¹.

Experiment 2 therefore had a 2 (trait reactance: high versus low) \times 3 (prime condition: work hard versus relax versus control) between-subjects design. Participants who scored either high or low on a chronic reactance scale were primed with the name of a significant other who wanted

¹ Experiments 1 and 2 were conducted at different universities. In an unrelated study using the same student population as Experiment 2, we obtained a ceiling effect on the anagram task from Experiment 1. We therefore added more difficult items to the task before administering it in Experiment 2.

them to work hard, relax, or neither, and the extent to which they worked hard was assessed via an anagram task. It was predicted that low reactant individuals would assimilate to the significant other's goal for them, replicating previous research (Shah, 2003). That is, those primed with the name of the "work hard" significant other would work harder than those primed with the name of the "relax" significant other. However, the opposite pattern was predicted for high reactant individuals, who were expected to contrast away from the desires of the significant other, automatically engaging in reactant behavior.

Methods

Participants

One hundred thirteen male and female introductory psychology students at a small, private, Southeastern University participated for course credit. Due to a computer malfunction, responses for the trait reactance scale were not collected for 2 participants, leaving data from 111 participants for the analyses.

Procedure

Participants were told the study was about the influence of significant others on goals. Participants were seated at a computer and asked to indicate the first names of the different people who most want them to work hard, relax, and eight other goals. All participants followed instructions and listed different people for each goal. As in the previous experiment, they were asked to indicate on 7-point scales how much the person triggers the goal and how much each person wants to control their lives.

Next, participants were told they would complete a "divided attention task" and were randomly assigned to be subliminally primed parafoveally across 75 trials either with the name of the significant other who wanted them to work hard (work hard condition), the name of the significant other who wanted them to relax (relax condition), or an 8-letter string that did not resemble a word (control condition). Each trial consisted of a fixation stimulus (the number 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, or 10), forward mask (8-letter nonsense word), prime stimulus (name of significant other), backward mask (8-letter nonsense word), and then another fixation stimulus (a series of 3 "X"s). Stimuli were presented in 16-point Arial font. The first fixation stimulus appeared in the center of the screen until the spacebar was pressed. Then in one quadrant, the forward mask (60 ms), prime stimulus (40 ms), backward mask (80 ms), and final fixation stimulus appeared consecutively. The final fixation stimulus remained on the screen until the "f" or "j" key was pressed. Participants were seated so the primes appeared at a 45° visual angle. Participants were instructed to continuously add the numbers that appeared at the center of the screen so they could report it to the experimenter at the end of the task. Participants were also instructed to respond to flashes on the right or left by pressing the "j" or "f" key, respectively (see Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003).

Next, participants completed a 28-item anagram task (instructions were the same as in Experiment 1), followed by the 11-item Hong refined reactance scale (Hong, 1992; Hong & Faedda, 1996). Sample items from the scale are "I consider advice from others to be an intrusion," "It makes me angry when another person is held up as a model for me," and "When something is prohibited I usually think 'that's exactly what I am going to do'". Participants rated on a scale of 1–5 the extent to which each statement applies to them. The scale mean was 28.9 with a standard deviation of 6.2, and was highly reliable, Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$. Finally, participants completed a funneled debriefing questionnaire similar to that used in Experiment 1.

Results and discussion

Funneled debriefing

As in Experiment 1, participants were not aware of the true relation between the different experimental tasks. In particular, participants were not aware of the relation between the significant others questionnaire and the anagrams task, or even reported that their significant others were on their mind while they completed the anagram task. Furthermore, participants were not aware of the nature of the primes. When asked to guess what the primes were, most participants guessed pictures or strings of letters, but not words. These findings suggest that the priming manipulation affected participants nonconsciously.

Performance data

Because reactance was a continuous variable, the performance data were analyzed using regression. As expected, the two-way interaction between prime condition and trait reactance on number of correctly solved anagrams was significant, $F(2, 105) = 5.10$, $p < .008$. Fig. 1 illustrates this effect, plotted in accordance with Aiken and West's (1991) recommendations. To better understand this interaction we performed two additional analyses. The first analysis compared the slope of reactance on correctly solved anagrams for those primed to relax to the slope of reactance on correctly solved anagrams for those primed to work hard, $F(1, 105) = 10.19$, $p < .001$. This analysis indicated that the contrast between relax and work hard conditions depends on the level of reactance. As expected, the slope of reactance for those in the control condition fell between the slopes for those primed to work hard and those primed to relax, but was not significantly different from either.

We further examined the interaction contrast between reactance and prime condition (work hard versus relax) using a spotlighting technique (Aiken & West, 1991), which compared the anagram performance of work hard versus relax primed participants at two standard deviations above and below the mean reactance level. This analysis showed that participants low in trait reactance solved more anagrams correctly if they were primed to work hard than if they were primed to relax ($t(105) = 3.05$, $p < .003$).

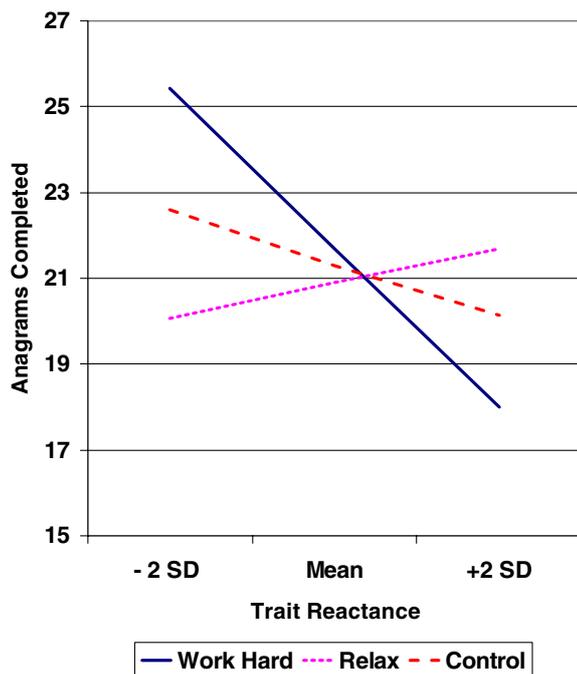


Fig. 1. Number of anagrams correctly completed in Experiment 2 as a function of prime condition and trait reactance.

Conversely, participants high in trait reactance solved fewer anagrams correctly if they were primed to work hard than if they were primed to relax ($t(105) = -2.32$, $p < .03$). Taken together, trait reactance moderated the effect of a significant other prime on goal-directed behavior.²

Significant others questionnaire

We reasoned that individual differences in reactance should be associated with perceptions of significant others as controlling. We therefore calculated on average how controlling each participant's 10 significant others were rated to be. As expected, trait reactance predicted these ratings, $F(1, 109) = 6.95$, $p < .01$, with high levels of trait reactance being associated with perceptions of significant others as more controlling. Therefore, although the triggers of reactance varied from other people (in Experiment 1) to individual differences in reactance (in Experiment 2), the data in both studies suggest that the perception of significant others as controlling is the mechanism underlying automatic reactance.

² In light of our decision to measure reactance following the dependent variable measure (and therefore also after the priming procedure) we conducted an ANOVA to determine if prime condition affected reactance scores. Prime condition did influence responses to the reactance scale, $F(1, 105) = 4.59$, $p < .02$, such that those primed to "work hard" reported higher reactance scores ($M = 31.09$, $SD = 5.71$) than those in the control ($M = 27.35$, $SD = 5.84$) or "relax" ($M = 27.68$, $SD = 6.38$) conditions. However, as this main effect does not explain the interaction between prime and reactance on performance, it was not a cause for concern. That is, the key test of our hypothesis is that the slopes of the work hard and relax conditions are not parallel—not that one is higher than the other.

In this experiment, as in Experiment 1, we found that individuals behave in opposition to the goals of significant others who they perceive to be controlling. This effect occurs following exposure to the name of a significant other below the threshold of conscious perception, and thus occurs without individuals' awareness or intention. Experiment 2 extended the basic finding that individuals nonconsciously oppose controlling significant others by showing that this effect is moderated by individual differences in reactance tendencies. Low reactant participants are more likely to automatically pursue the goal that a significant other has for them. This result is congruent with recent research showing that people subliminally primed with the name of a significant other whom they associate with a goal will strive to achieve that goal on a subsequent task (Shah, 2003). However, high reactant individuals are more likely to pursue the goal opposite to that which their significant others has for them. This result is congruent with our hypothesis that sometimes the nonconscious activation of a significant other associated with a particular goal will automatically lead individuals to pursue an opposing goal.

General discussion

In this paper we have argued that relationship reactance can occur nonconsciously and unintentionally. In exploring this phenomenon, we adopted a social cognitive framework and subliminal priming procedures. The data from two studies have demonstrated that it is possible for individuals to reject the wishes of significant others without a conscious intention to do so, and go on to nonconsciously engage in behaviors that directly oppose the significant others' wishes. We have identified two triggers of nonconscious relationship reactance, both based on perceptions of control: (1) significant others perceived as controlling can lead to automatic reactance in individuals, and (2) individuals chronically high in reactant tendencies, who see everyone as controlling, automatically react against significant others' wishes.

The current findings support the notion of the relational schema as a psychological construct by providing additional evidence that individuals cognitively represent their relationship partners in an associative network of relational information, and that certain aspects of relational representations become so well-learned that they manifest themselves automatically and nonconsciously upon encountering the relevant relationship partner. Here, we add to research demonstrating that significant others are associated with interaction patterns and the motivational states to which these interaction patterns give rise (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Moretti & Higgins, 1999; Shah, 2003). The current findings extend this literature by identifying one aspect of a relational representation that can lead individuals to react against significant others' goals—namely, the perception of significant others as threats to autonomy.

In the current studies, participants' goal pursuits were antagonistic to their significant others' goals and therefore illustrated reactance as originally defined: noncompliance, not merely resistance (Brehm, 1966). Beyond demonstrating reactance, this research offers an alternative conceptualization of reactance, a classical psychological process that has been discussed for decades as consciously-based (Brehm, 1989). We suggest that reactance becomes automatized in certain individuals, and we have provided evidence that this is the case. This perspective has important implications for understanding and managing reactance, primarily because correcting nonconscious processes requires very different procedures than those employed for conscious correction processes. One potential approach for managing nonconscious reactance might be for high reactant individuals to learn to identify the situations that trigger reactance and plan in advance how to respond to these situations to minimize the chances of a behavioral backlash (e.g., see Gollwitzer's (1999) work on implementation intentions). Given that reactance can be highly inappropriate and possibly even detrimental to individuals and their relationship partners in many situations (Frank et al., 1998; Seibel & Dowd, 1999), future research might explore strategies to overcome automatic reactance.

A potential limitation of the present research is that it does not incorporate other variables that might predict similar patterns of responses to significant other primes. The perception that a significant other is controlling might correlate with a constellation of other perceptions that together signal a negatively toned significant other, or correlate with other individual difference variables that together signal a tendency to feel less close to others or believe others are less trustworthy. One hint that this might be true is that reactance is negatively correlated with concerns for warmth, affiliation, and social harmony and positively correlated with concerns for justice and fairness (Buboltz et al., 2003). It is conceivable that individuals who are less "socially" concerned are also less likely respond positively to significant other primes, and might instead show oppositional response patterns. Future research could address reactance-like responses using moderators other than reactance and thereby help clarify whether a more general behavioral or dispositional tendency moderates these effects. It might be that the results reported in this article are in fact more general than the present studies suggest.

More broadly speaking, many individual difference and situational variables that might moderate significant other priming effects remain unexplored. For instance, individuals may not pursue a significant other's goal if they feel the goal is not *self-relevant*, no matter how close they are to the significant other. Conversely, individuals who score high in need for approval or self-monitoring might be more inclined to adopt significant others' goals. Future investigations will hopefully illuminate the complex automatic responses that individuals can have to their significant others.

Most environmental influences on goal-directed behavior are moderated by individual differences, be they

transient states or long-lasting motivations (e.g., Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). Following from this view, we proposed that individuals might sometimes respond to significant others by adopting opposing goals. Specifically, we proposed that automatic reactance can occur and moderate the behavioral effect of significant other priming. We found that it is possible for people who perceive a significant other as controlling to reject the wishes of the significant other without a conscious intention to do so, and go on to nonconsciously engage in behaviors that directly oppose the significant other's wishes.

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