

For a better 'I,' there needs to be a supportive 'we'

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If you're one of those lucky individuals with high motivation and who actively pursues personal growth goals, thank your family and friends who support you.

People who view their relationships as supportive may confidently strive for [growth](#), new University of Michigan research shows.

U-M researchers used data from samples from the United States and Japan to determine if personal growth is an outcome of an individual's traits or the positive relationships they have with others.

In Study 1, about 200 participants were randomly assigned to one of three relationship conditions: supportive, nonsupportive and neutral. In the two main conditions, some had to consider a person in their life with whom they felt comfortable (or not) and did not worry (did worry) about being abandoned by them. The neutral group had to consider an acquaintance for whom they did not have strong feelings.

Participants read a hypothetical scenario in which they had to choose between a higher-paying job with high familiarity (Company A) or a lower-paying job that required learning that would help their long-term career development (Company B).

Among those in the supportive [relationship](#) condition, 65 percent selected Company B, whereas 40 percent of those in the nonsupportive condition chose the same [company](#). Fifty percent of the neutral group

picked Company B.

Participants who thought about a supportive person were more willing to choose a job that promoted personal growth, even at lower pay, in part because they had more self-confidence, the study indicated.

Studies 2 and 3 analyzed people's perceptions of the support received from family and friends to determine personal growth tendencies in two cultures.

Using data from the Survey of Midlife Development in the United States, more than 3,800 participants in Study 2 rated the support received from family and friends. The questions included: "How much does your family (do your friends) really care about you?" and "How much can you open up to them if you need to talk about your worries?" They also rated their willingness to develop their potential and grow as a person, as well as self-confidence.

People who reported their relationships to be supportive had a greater willingness to grow personally and felt more self-confident, the study showed. The results were similar in the data from the Survey of Midlife Development in Japan, which sampled about 1,000 people.

"The more supportive people judged their relationships to be, the higher their personal growth tendencies, even in a culture that puts more emphasis on the collective rather than the individual," said David Lee, the study's lead author who obtained his doctorate in psychology at U-M.

Overall, the findings support the "I-through-We" perspective, which means the social tendency to connect with others, and the individual tendency to strive and grow as individuals, are not mutually exclusive and may augment and magnify each other.

"In other words, relationships do not necessarily conflict with but help sustain one's personal growth," said Oscar Ybarra, U-M professor of psychology and of management and organizations.

The findings thus address both the importance of distinguishing yourself from others by fulfilling personal goals, but also being a good group member by fulfilling social obligations and cultivating supportive relationships.

"Building positive social connections with others should put people in a good position to receive social [support](#) that is instrumental to personal growth, as well as allowing [people](#) to strike a balance between two fundamental values: to strive and connect," said Lee, who is now a postdoctoral fellow at Ohio State University.

Provided by University of Michigan

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