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RESEARCH PAPER

When Romantic Partners' Goals Conflict: Effects on Relationship Quality and Subjective Well-Being

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Abstract Most studies have explored goal pursuit from an intraindividual perspective; however, it is becoming increasingly clear that people's relationships influence many aspects of goal pursuit (Fitzsimons and Finkel in Curr Direct Psychol Sci 19(2):101–105, 2010). The current study examined the influence of goal conflict between romantic partners on relationship quality and the subjective well-being of the partners. In a sample of 105 dating couples ($N = 210$) both partners provided ratings of their subjective well-being, relationship quality, and the degree of conflict they experience when trying to pursue their goals. Structural equation modeling was used to conduct dyadic analyses on the variables. Results showed that both partners' reports of higher goal conflict were directly associated with lower relationship quality and lower subjective well-being. Lower relationship quality was, in turn, also associated with lower subjective well-being. Furthermore, one partner's report of goal conflict was indirectly related to the other partner's subjective well-being through relationship quality. These findings indicate that relational influences on goal pursuit have implications not only for goal pursuit but also for well-being and relationship quality.

Keywords Goal conflict · Goal pursuit · Interdependence theory · Romantic relationships · Relationship quality · Subjective well-being

1 Introduction

Most actions are goal directed, as people strive to make progress toward goals that provide them with a sense of structure, meaning, and purpose (Austin and Vancouver 1996). Given the importance and pervasiveness of goal pursuit in human action, it is not surprising that people's ability to pursue their own goals has been linked to their subjective well-being (Diener 1984; King 2008; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). More specifically, goal pursuit has

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been repeatedly linked to all three components of subjective well-being: higher levels of life satisfaction, higher positive affect, and lower negative affect (Brunstein 1993; Diener 1984; Emmons 1999; King 2008; Lazarus 1991). In contrast, thwarted goal pursuit has been linked to decreases in life satisfaction, decreases in positive affect, and increases in negative affect (Emmons 1999; King 2008; Lazarus 1991).

Although existing research provides convincing evidence for the importance of goal pursuit for subjective well-being, it has largely emphasized the individualistic nature of goal pursuit. This may be problematic because most goals are pursued in a social context. Until recently, the relational context in which goals are pursued has been largely neglected in the literature (Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010). However, the handful of studies that have examined relational influences indicate that social relationships do indeed influence goal pursuit (see Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010 for a review). For example, people who have romantic partners who provide social support make more progress toward their goals than those who do not have supportive partners (Brunstein et al. 1996; Overall et al. 2010; Rafaeli et al. 2008). Thus, the social context does influence goal pursuit, and further studies are needed to increase our understanding of how relationship partners impact people's goals and the implications of these relational influences for subjective well-being.

When goals are pursued in the context of a relationship, it is important to consider that both partners have their own goals that they try to pursue. The partners may experience conflict when they try to pursue goals that are incompatible with their partner's goals or the relationship. The purpose of the current study was to examine the associations between the level of conflict relationship partners experience when they try to pursue their goals, their relationship quality, and subjective well-being.

2 Goal Pursuit in Relationships

Interdependence theory (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003) proposes that as relationships develop, the partners in the relationship become increasingly interdependent. This increasing level of interdependence is especially likely to occur in romantic relationships, as partners begin to spend more time together. The increasing interdependence means that the partners exert influence on each other's activities, and their actions begin to have implications for their partner. Thus, relationship partners need to find ways to coordinate their goal-directed actions, often on a daily basis. In highly interdependent relationships, it is inevitable that the partners' goals will at times conflict because no two individuals' goals are perfectly aligned.

Although some instances of goal conflict may be isolated occurrences, given that many goals that individuals pursue are long-term goals (Emmons 1999), some conflicts regarding the pursuit of goals may occur repeatedly (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003). Partners may be able to deal with some of these recurring conflicts in a manner that is satisfactory to both of them, but some of their goals may be highly incompatible. It may be hard to find an acceptable resolution when the partners are dealing with highly incongruent goals. For example, if one partner has a goal to become a successful lawyer, the pursuit of this goal may require spending long hours at the office and working on weekends. If the other partner has a goal to spend a lot of time together, it may be difficult for the partners to resolve the conflict between these goals, given that these two goals are highly incongruent. When two goals are highly incongruent, the partners may find it difficult to successfully integrate their goal pursuits, which may result in repeated experiences of conflict over the pursuit of these goals.

When relationship partners have goals that lead to recurring conflict over their pursuit, the quality of the relationship may suffer. Interdependence theory suggests that repeated experiences of goal conflict may be harmful for relationships because their resolution continuously tests the partners' commitment to each other (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003; Wieselquist et al. 1999). To resolve the conflict between incongruent goals, the partners have to make a choice between pursuing their self-interests and accommodating their partner (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Read and Miller 1989; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003). Although putting the partner's interests ahead of one's own may demonstrate commitment to the partner and benefit the relationship (Impett and Gordon 2008; Rusbult and Van Lange 2003; Van Lange et al. 1997), the partners may not always react to the conflict in such a constructive manner (Yovetich and Rusbult 1994), especially when it occurs frequently. Furthermore, if one partner always gives in to the other partner's needs, this may also have negative consequences if it results in not being able to meet own needs and make progress toward a particular goal (Impett and Gordon 2008). Thus, enduring goal conflict between the partners may be associated with lower relationship quality.

In addition to relationship quality, goal conflict may also be associated with lower levels of subjective well-being for the partners. First, if goal conflict is related to lower relationship quality, it should also be associated with lower subjective well-being because intimate relationships play a primary role in influencing people's well-being (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Gere and MacDonald 2010). In fact, prior research has shown that the quality of people's relationships is one of the strongest predictors of subjective well-being (Diener and Diener McGavran 2008; Diener et al. 1999; Heller et al. 2004) with longitudinal evidence suggesting that changes in relationships result in changes in well-being (Lucas et al. 2003). Second, goal conflict may also be associated with well-being through possible effects on goal pursuit. Studies that have examined within-person goal conflict have shown that having conflicting goals is associated with lower levels of subjective well-being because goal conflict leads to greater rumination about the conflicting goals and less action taken toward making progress (Emmons 1999; Emmons and King 1988). It is possible that encountering conflict with one's romantic partner when one tries to pursue one's own goals may have similar effects on goal pursuit, and thus, on well-being.

3 Prior Research on Goal Conflict

Despite the potential importance of goal conflict for both relationship quality and subjective well-being, existing studies have not examined how conflict between intimate partners over the pursuit of long-term goals is associated with their relational and personal well-being. Existing relevant research has explored either the influence of conflict between relationship partners on relationship quality, or the influence of intrapersonal goal conflict on well-being. We briefly review the main findings of existing work in these areas.

Prior research on intimate relationship partners has shown that conflict between the partners can be very damaging to a relationship (Bradbury et al. 2000; Bradbury and Karney 2004; Gottman and Levenson 2000, 2002), especially if the partners respond to conflict with destructive behaviors and hostility (Bradbury et al. 2000; Driver and Gottman 2004; Gottman and Levenson 2000). Although these studies clearly point to the potential damaging effects of conflict, they have focused on conflict between relationship partners in general (often asking couples to discuss an ongoing conflict in the relationship), and not specifically on conflict over the pursuit of long-term goals. It is important to consider goal conflict on its own because conflict over long-term goals may constitute a relatively small

proportion of overall levels of conflict. For example, for many couples, conflict due to one partner's stressful job, moodiness, or annoyance with the other partner's habits may occur more frequently than over goal pursuit. Furthermore, conflict generated by long-term goals may be a serious issue, and as such, have a large impact on the relationship. This may be especially true if the partners' goals are highly incongruent, making it harder for them to integrate their goal pursuit successfully and prevent it from becoming a recurrent issue. Thus, it may be important to examine goal conflict separately from other types of conflict and test its association with relationship quality and subjective well-being.

Prior studies on within-person goal conflict suggest that goal conflict can be damaging for well-being. Higher levels of conflict among one's own goals predict greater ambivalence toward the goals, lower levels of subjective well-being, and greater depression (Emmons 1999; Emmons and King 1988; Kelly et al. 2011; King 2008). For example, a series of studies by Emmons and King (1988) showed that individuals were more likely to think about goals that generated within-person goal conflict but at the same time, they were also less likely to engage in activities that would have enabled progress toward these goals. Furthermore, this tendency to think more but do less about these conflicting goals mediated the association between goal conflict and well-being. These findings show that intrapersonal goal conflict results in lower subjective well-being, making it possible that goal conflict between intimate partners leads to similar problems for well-being, especially if it leads to greater ambivalence and lower progress toward one's own goals.

4 The Current Study

The aim of the current study was to examine how conflict over the pursuit of long-term goals influences the quality of romantic partners' relationship and their subjective well-being. We collected data from both partners in romantic relationships and asked them to report on their relationship quality, subjective well-being, and goal conflict. We then used structural equation modeling to conduct dyadic analysis (i.e., the dyad is treated as the unit of analysis, not the individual) on the relations between the variables. We predicted that the extent to which relationship partners report experiencing higher levels of unresolved conflict with their partners when they try to pursue their long-term goals will be associated with lower relationship quality, which will, in turn, be associated with lower levels of subjective well-being for both partners. In addition, we also tested whether a direct relation between goal conflict and lower levels of well-being exists in addition to the mediated effect of goal conflict on well-being through relationship quality. Finally, we also tested partner effects and examined whether each partner's reports of goal conflict relate not only to their own subjective well-being, but also to the well-being of their partner.

5 Method

5.1 Participants and Procedures

One hundred and five dating couples ($N = 210$) were recruited for this study through the introductory psychology participant pool at the University of Toronto, Mississauga campus. Relationship partners came into the laboratory together and after filling out the consent forms, each partner was seated in a separate room to fill out a series of questionnaires. Student participants were given course credits and their romantic partners were

paid $20 for their participation. In order to participate in the study, participants had to be dating their romantic partner for at least 2 months. Participants were 19.2 years old on average (SD = 1.8, range = 17–26) and were involved with their partner for 17.9 months on average (SD = 14.6, range = 1–66). None of the couples were living together and none were married or had children. Participants were of various ethnic backgrounds: 37.6% were Asian, 33.8% were European, 6.7% were Caribbean, 6.7% were South American, and 14.8% were of other backgrounds.

5.2 Measures

After answering several demographic questions, participants filled out measures of their subjective well-being. First, they completed the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985), which is a five-item scale measuring overall life satisfaction. For each of the five items, participants rated their level of satisfaction with their life on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). A sample item from the scale is "*I am satisfied with my life*". Responses to the five items were averaged for analysis ($M = 5.00$, SD = 1.01, $\alpha = .78$). Next, participants completed the hedonic balance scale (Schimmack et al. 2002) to assess their positive and negative affect. This measure asks respondents to rate how often they felt six affective states over a specific time period on a scale of 1 (*almost never*) to 7 (*almost always*). Three of the items were positive affective states (felt positive, pleasant, good) and three of the items were negative affective states (felt negative, unpleasant, bad). Means were created for positive affect ($M = 5.22$, SD = .84, $\alpha = .77$) and negative affect ($M = 2.94$, SD = 1.12, $\alpha = .80$) separately for analysis. The time frame was the past 6 months because longer time periods would have extended beyond the duration of many romantic relationships in this study.

To assess relationship quality, participants filled out a modified version of the satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier 1976). This measure assesses the overall quality of the dyadic relationship, based on behavioral indicators of dyadic adjustment. Items were modified where needed to be more applicable to dating couples. The measure consists of seven items, each rated on a scale of 1 (*once every 2 or 3 months*) to 5 (*more often than once a day*). Two sample items from this scale are "*How often do you confide in your partner?*" and "*How often do you get on your partner's nerves?*" Items from this scale were recoded so that higher numbers represented higher relationship quality and were averaged for analysis ($M = 3.99$, SD = .57, $\alpha = .72$). In addition to filling out the questionnaire for themselves, participants were also asked to report on their partner's relationship quality on the same seven items (e.g., *How often does your partner discuss or consider terminating your relationship?*; reverse coded), which were also averaged for analysis ($M = 3.93$, SD = .67, $\alpha = .74$).

Participants' goals were measured using the goal strivings approach (Emmons 1986, 1999). In this approach, participants are asked to think about and list goals that they typically try to pursue in the different domains of their lives. This measure is intended to elicit goals that people pursue over extended periods of time, rather than goals that are more short term (Emmons 1999). After listing ten goals that they typically try to pursue, participants selected the five most important. These five most important goals were then individually rated on a number of characteristics, including two items to assess to what extent their relationship makes it easier or more difficult to pursue the given goal. Participants rated to what extent their relationship is good for their goal progress, and they also rated to what extent their relationship is bad for their goal progress. Both items were rated on a scale from 1 (*not good/bad at all*) to 5 (*very good/bad*). The ratings were averaged

across the five most important goals separately for relationship-good ($M = 4.05$, SD = .73) and relationship-bad ratings ($M = 1.89$, SD = .76).

5.3 Data Analysis

We used structural equation modeling to analyze the data with the software Mplus 5 (Muthén and Muthén 2007). In the measurement part of the model we modeled each of the constructs as latent variables, using the scores on the questionnaires to define the latent variable. More specifically, women's subjective well-being was modeled as a latent variable with their life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect scores as indicators. The same was also done to model men's subjective well-being. Negative affect scores were reversed so that higher scores represent lower negative affect. We modeled relationship quality as a dyadic latent variable, using men's and women's self-ratings of relationship quality and their ratings' of each other's relationship quality as indicators. By modeling relationship quality as a dyadic latent variable, the construct represents the shared variance in the scores of the two partners. In other words, it represents the agreement between the partners regarding the quality of their relationship. This modeling approach increases the reliability of the assessment of relationship quality and eliminates the perceptual subjective biases of each partner because the latent variable only represents common variance between the partners (partners' subjective biases are present in the scores as unique variance in each partner's score, which are not reflected in the latent construct). A further advantage of our approach is that it reduces the effect of shared method variance because predictor variables have to covary equally with ratings by both partners. Finally, women's goal conflict was modeled as a latent variable using their aggregate relationship-good ratings and their aggregate relationship-bad ratings. The same measurement model was used for men's goal conflict. Goal conflict was modeled separately for men and women because they each rated the level of interference experienced for their own goals. However, we expected to find a residual correlation between the goal conflict ratings of the partners, because the level of conflict between the partners' goals should be experienced by both partners.

In the structural part of the model (i.e., the test of the relations between the variables of interest), we assumed that both men's and women's reports of goal conflict would have a direct effect on relationship quality and that relationship quality would have a direct effect on the subjective well-being of both partners. We also assumed that the partners' reports of goal conflict would be directly related to their own subjective well-being and indirectly related to their partner's subjective well-being, mediated through relationship quality. We first conducted the analysis by estimating the parameters for men and women freely to examine possible gender differences. However, we found no evidence of gender differences, thus, we constrained the model parameters to be equal across genders in order to increase power and gain more precise estimates in the final model. In order to evaluate the fit of the model, we relied on a number of fit indices: a non-significant Chi-square value, a comparative fit index (CFI) greater than .90, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) less than .08, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) less than .10, all of which indicate acceptable model fit (Kline 2005).

6 Results

The final model with the fully standardized path coefficients is presented in Fig. 1 (see Table 1 for variable correlations). (The standardized coefficients differ slightly for men

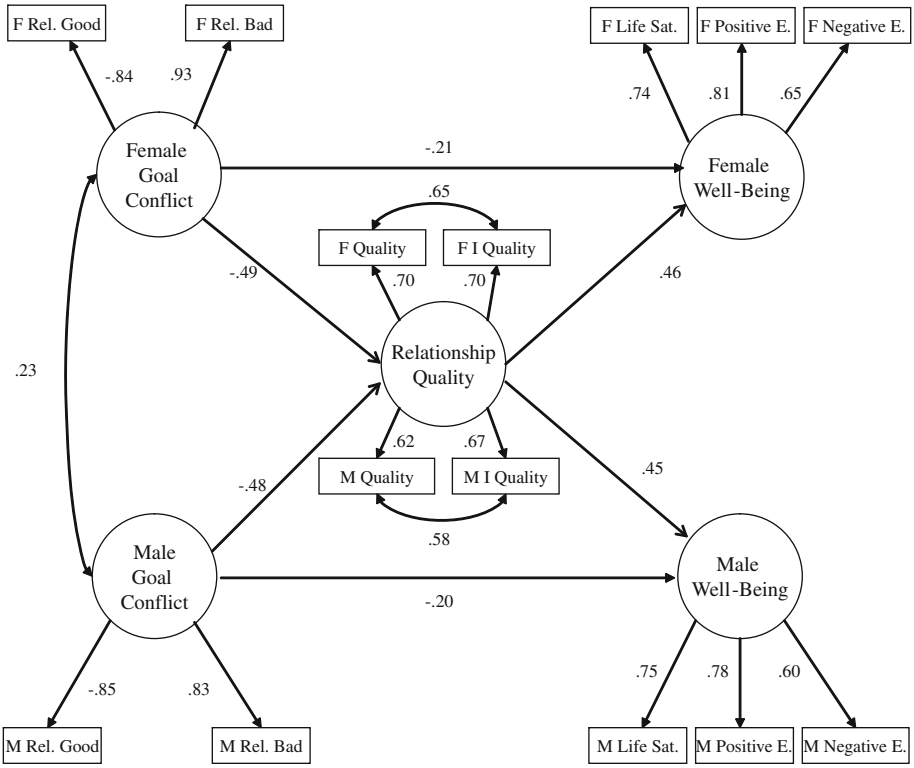

Fig. 1 Final model showing the relations between goal congruence, relationship quality, and subjective well-being. Fully standardized model parameters. *F* female, *M* male, *E* emotions, *Sat* satisfaction, *I* informant report, *Rel* relationship

and women because the constraints were imposed on the unstandardized parameters.) The fit of the model was good, χ^2 (77) = 82.60, $P = .311$, CFI = .991, RMSEA = .026 [CI (.00, .06)], SRMR = .085. In the measurement model, the indicators showed high factor loadings on their respective latent factors (all above .60). In the measurement model for relationship quality, we allowed for correlated error terms between participants' ratings of their own relationship quality and their ratings of their partner's relationship quality for both women [.65, SE = .06, CI (.54, .76)] and men [.58, SE = .06, CI (.46, .70)]. These correlated errors indicate that participants assumed greater similarity between their own and their partner's ratings than actually existed, thus showing evidence of rating bias. In addition, as expected, we also found a residual correlation between women's and men's reports of goal conflict [.23, SE = .11, CI (.01, .44)]. There were no other correlated error terms in the model. The lack of such correlated errors indicates that the results of our analysis are not driven by rating biases (e.g., self-perceptions, social desirability), but instead the results are due to effects that are consistent across the partners (i.e., one partner's ratings are not only related to their own ratings but also to the ratings of their partner).

For the results of the structural model, we provide the standardized path estimates, standard errors, and the 95% confidence intervals of the path estimates. If the confidence intervals do not include the value of zero, the path estimate is significant at $P < .05$.

Table 1 Means and correlations between variables included in the model

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. F Life Sat.	5.04													
2. F Pos. E.	.58	5.26												
3. F Neg. E.	.50	.62	-3.02											
4. M Life Sat.	.31	.22	.22	4.98										
5. M Pos. E.	.24	.15	.05	.55	5.18									
6. M Neg. E.	.08	.14	.09	.42	.48	−2.85								
7. F RQ	.43	.39	.34	.27	.22	.07	4.08							
8. F I. RQ	.41	.37	.39	.27	.24	.10	.83	4.05						
9. M RQ	.29	.27	.29	.40	.19	.24	.44	.42	3.90					
10. M I. RQ	.36	.33	.26	.45	.21	.20	.46	.39	.73	3.84				
11. F R. Good	.33	.32	.35	.08	.12	.10	.36	.47	.13	.18	4.00			
12. F R. Bad	−.40	−.30	−.38	−.15	−.20	−.08	−.39	−.52	−.23	−.23	−.78	1.87		
13. M R Good	.23	.16	.24	.36	.22	.17	.36	.32	.38	.48	.12	−.22	4.11	
14. M R. Bad	−.24	−.17	−.21	−.30	−.23	−.33	−.36	−.25	−.40	−.48	−.12	.18	−.70	1.87

F female, *M* male, *Sat* satisfaction, *RQ* relationship quality, *Pos* positive, *Neg* negative, *E* emotions, *I* informant report, *R* relationship

Furthermore, non-overlapping confidence intervals between estimates indicate that the paths are significantly different from each other. As expected, both women's [−.49, SE = .06, 95% CI (−.38, −.60)] and men's reports of higher goal conflict [−.48, SE = .06, CI (−.37, −.59)] were significant predictors of lower relationship quality. In turn, relationship quality was a significant predictor of both women's [.46, SE = .11, 95% CI (.25, .68)] and men's [.45, SE = .10, CI (.25, .66)] subjective well-being. Furthermore, women's reports of goal conflict were directly related to their own subjective well-being [−.21, SE = .10, CI (−.005, −.41)], as were men's reports of goal conflict to their own subjective well-being [−.20, SE = .10, CI (−.003, −.40)].

We also tested whether the indirect paths between goal conflict and subjective well-being, mediated through relationship quality, were significant. The indirect path between women's reports of goal conflict and their own subjective well-being was significant [−.23, SE = .06, CI (−.34, −.11)], as was the indirect path between men's reports of goal conflict and their own subjective well-being [−.22, SE = .06, CI (−.33, −.11)]. More importantly, we also found evidence of significant mediated partner effects: women's reports of goal conflict were related to men's subjective well-being [−.22, SE = .06, CI (−.34, −.11)], and men's reports of goal conflict were related to women's subjective well-being [−.22, SE = .06, CI (−.34, −.11)].

7 Discussion

In sum, in a study of dating couples, we found that higher levels of goal conflict predicted lower relationship quality and lower subjective well-being. Each partner's report of goal conflict was related to his or her own subjective well-being, as well as to overall relationship quality. Furthermore, each partner's report of goal conflict was also related to the other partner's subjective well-being. The effect from one partner's report of goal conflict to the other partner's subjective well-being was fully mediated through relationship quality. It is important to note that the existence of these partner effects indicate that our results are not due to rating biases because one person's ratings were also related to the other person's ratings.

Our finding that higher levels of goal conflict are associated with lower relationship quality is consistent with interdependence theory's proposition that repeated experiences of goal conflict are damaging to a relationship (Rusbult and Van Lange 2003; Wieselquist et al. 1999). Given that our measure assessed long-term goals, the results suggest that when partners are unable to resolve conflict between their goals, they experience decreased relationship quality. These findings are important because prior studies show that the frequency of conflict between partners is not a consistent predictor of relationship quality (Bradbury et al. 2000). One factor that has been shown to be important in the link between conflict and relationship quality is the way the partners deal with the conflict, especially negativity between partners (Bradbury et al. 2000; Driver and Gottman 2004; Gottman and Levenson 2000). Another factor that may be important is what the conflict is caused by. When partners run into conflict as they attempt to pursue their important long-term goals, it may be particularly damaging, especially when a simple solution cannot be found due to high incongruence between the goals of the partners. Future research should explore the different ways in which couples attempt to resolve conflict between their goals, their effectiveness, and consequences for the quality of the relationship.

Consistent with prior research (Diener and Diener McGavran 2008; Diener et al. 1999; Heller et al. 2004), we also found that relationship quality was associated with the

subjective well-being of the partners. Furthermore, the indirect path between goal conflict and well-being, mediated through relationship quality, was also significant. Importantly, the partners' reports of goal conflict were indirectly associated not only with their own subjective well-being, but also with the other partner's subjective well-being. These partner effects are important because they demonstrate that our results are not due to rating biases but are due to an actual association between the partners' experiences of goal conflict and their well-being. Rating biases would produce correlations only between the scores of the same person, but not across the partners.

Finally, we also found that goal conflict was directly associated with each partner's own subjective well-being. This additional, direct relation between goal conflict and well-being has probably emerged because the conflict may also have implications for the partners' ability to move toward the achievement of their goals. Prior research has demonstrated that people's ability to pursue their goals is directly linked to their subjective well-being (Diener 1984; Emmons 1999; King 2008; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005). Experiences of conflict with one's partner over the pursuit of long-term goals may lead to slower or stalled progress and may also result in feelings of ambivalence toward the goals. Slow progress and ambivalence have direct implications for subjective well-being (Emmons and King 1988), and as such, these effects would not be mediated through experiences of relationship quality. Future work should explore in greater detail how goal conflict with relationship partners influences people's feelings of ambivalence toward their goals and their ability to make goal progress.

These findings also have important implications for research on goal pursuit. Existing studies have primarily focused on goal pursuit from an intraindividual perspective, although recent studies have shown that many aspects of goal pursuit are influenced by social relationships (Fitzsimons and Finkel 2010). For example, it has been shown that relationship partners influence the perceived attainability and value of a goal, which has consequences for the resources people devote to goal pursuit (Shah 2003, 2005). Our study extends the findings of these recent studies that show interpersonal influences on goal pursuit. First, we focused on conflict between relationship partners when they try to pursue their goals as an additional source of interpersonal influence on goal pursuit. Second, we also showed that goal conflict between partners has implications for both relationship quality and subjective well-being. These findings are important because they suggest that relationships not only influence goal pursuit, but that these relational influences have implications for relationship quality and the well-being of the partners. Future studies should examine additional ways in which relationship partners can influence each other's goal pursuit and also consider the potential consequences for relational and personal well-being.

We want to note that one of the limitations of our study is that we measured all of the variables at the same time, which means that we cannot establish the temporal sequence or the causal direction of the effects based on these data. It could be argued that causal directions go in the opposite direction, and higher levels of well-being result in lower reports of goal conflict; however, prior research has clearly established the causal links between goal pursuit and subjective well-being (Brunstein 1993; Diener and Fujita 1995; Emmons 1986, 1999; King 2008). It could also be argued that higher well-being results in higher relationship quality, which results in reporting lower levels of goal conflict. However, prior research has shown that changes in relationship quality are linked to changes in well-being, whereas the effects of well-being on relationships are weak (Lucas et al. 2003). Furthermore, our argument for goal conflict influencing relationship quality is consistent with the findings of recent research. Experimental studies have shown that

people's goal pursuits causally shift their evaluations of their relationship partners (Fitzsimons and Fishbach 2010; Fitzsimons and Shah 2008; Shah 2005). Furthermore, in our own data, one partner's report of goal conflict was related to the other partner's subjective well-being, showing that our results are not due individuals' perceptions. Taken together, existing findings suggest the possibility of causal influence on relationship quality, although these causal links cannot be firmly established based on our own data and should be explored further in future studies.

Some other limitations of our study also need to be mentioned. In all of the couples who took part in our study, at least one partner was a current university student. Given the high education level of this sample, we cannot be certain that our findings would generalize to a more representative sample of the general population. Future studies should test the generalizability of our results in a primarily non-student, community sample. A related limitation is that our participants were involved in dating relationships and were relatively young. Although it is likely that goal conflict would play an equally, if not more important, role in relationships with greater degrees of interdependence, this should be tested in a sample of couples who are either married or cohabiting. It is possible that for couples whose lives are much more intertwined, goal conflict may be even more important than for dating couples, given that they need to coordinate their goals on a daily basis across multiple domains in their lives. Future studies should examine what role goal conflict has in these more interdependent relationships.

Given that goals are pursued in the context of social relationships, it is important to examine how people's most important relationships, such as their romantic relationships, influence their goal pursuits. Romantic partners' influence on goal pursuit, more specifically, the level of conflict between the partners' goals is important, as our study shows that it has implications for both subjective well-being and the quality of the relationship itself. Future research should continue to consider relational influences on goal pursuit. Furthermore, it will also be important to examine how conflicting goals between partners create problems in the relationship and how these problems may be mitigated.

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