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The effects of romantic partners' goal congruence on affective well-being

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ABSTRACT

Affective well-being in romantic couples was examined from the perspective of interdependence theory. The independent variables were (a) presence of partner, (b) whether an activity met the actor's goals, and (c) goals of the actor's partner. Dependent variables were feelings of closeness and affective well-being (happiness, sadness, anger, anxiety). We predicted a three-way interaction with the highest affective well-being when partners are together and activities meet both partners' goals. In Study 1, data from 194 married individuals who participated in an experience sampling study supported our predictions. Feelings of closeness partially mediated the effect on affective well-being. Study 2 replicated the findings with 112 participants in dating relationships who recalled specific events and made ratings about goals and affective well-being.

1. Introduction

Goal theories of well-being propose that the pursuit of personal goals is important for an individual's well-being (Diener, 1984). These theories argue that well-being increases when goals are reached or goal progress is made (Diener, 1984). Many studies support these fundamental tenets of goal theories of well-being (Brunstein, 1993; Brunstein, Schultheiss, & Grassmann, 1998; Diener & Fujita, 1995; Emmons, 1986, 1999; Emmons, Cheung, & Tehrani, 1998; Emmons & King, 1988; King, 2008; King, Richards, & Stemmerich, 1998; Riediger & Freund, 2004). Indeed, the effects of goal progress on well-being are so robust that some researchers have suggested that the best way to increase well-being in the long term is to adopt and pursue important and attainable personal goals (King, 2008).

Although past research has provided important insights into the relation between goals and well-being, goal theories of well-being tend to ignore that people often pursue their goals in the company of others. The present article examines goal pursuit in the context of romantic relationships. Individuals in close relationships cannot simply pursue their individualistic goals, but have to take the goals of their relationship partner into account. The coordination with a romantic partner can occur at various levels from major life goals to more mundane decisions such as "what TV show to watch, whose friends to go out with, or whether to engage in sexual activity" (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005, p. 327). Interdependence theory provides a theoretical framework to investigate goals and well-being from an interpersonal perspective (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

Interdependence theory distinguishes three types of situations according to different degrees of *covariation of interests* (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In competitive, zero-sum situations interests are negatively related. Such situations are likely to be rare in intimate relationships because individuals in relationships tend to be concerned about their partner's well-being (Pinkus, Lockwood, Schimmack, & Fournier, 2008; Schimmack & Lucas, 2010). A second type of situation consists of situations in which partners' interests are perfectly aligned. Finally, a third type of situation consists of situations in which partners' interests are neither perfectly aligned, nor exact opposites. At times, it can be difficult to make choices that are equally fulfilling for both partners' individual goals. We use the terms *goal-congruent* and *goal-incongruent* situations to refer to these two latter types of situations respectively. Our main goal was to examine how these situations influence both partners' emotional experiences, which are one important component of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984).

One simple solution to goal-incongruent situations would be for each partner to pursue his or her goals individually. However, relationship partners are reluctant to choose this option because it could undermine the relationship (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Another solution is to *sacrifice*, where sacrifice is defined as departing "from one's immediate interests to promote the partner's interests" (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, p. 362). This distinguishes

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goal-incongruent situations from goal-congruent situations in which both partners can engage in a shared activity that is consistent with both partners' immediate interests.

Several studies have examined sacrifice in intimate relationships (Van Lange et al., 1997). However, relatively few studies have examined mundane sacrifices and their immediate consequences for affective well-being. Impett et al. (2005) demonstrated that participants experienced more positive affect on days when sacrifice was approach motivated (e.g., make the partner happy) and more negative affect when it was avoidance motivated (e.g., avoid conflict). There are two possible, and not mutually exclusive, explanations for this result. One possibility is that partners recognize that approach motivated sacrifice is motivated by a concern for their well-being. This elicits feelings of affection or gratitude and motivates partners to sacrifice for their partner later in the day, which then elicits positive feelings in the partner who initially sacrificed. In this model, sacrificing may have no immediate positive effects or even negative effects on well-being. The well-being gain is a result of a system of mutual exchanges of sacrifices. An alternative explanation would be that sacrifice for the benefit of a partner immediately increases well-being because individuals benefit from the happiness that their sacrifice produces in their partner. To test these models, it is necessary to measure affective well-being in goal-congruent and goal-incongruent situations.

Impett et al. (2005) focused on the consequences of sacrificing on the affective well-being of the individual who sacrificed pursuing own goals, but it is also important to study the consequences of being the beneficiary of a sacrifice for affective well-being. Although it may seem obvious that being a beneficiary of a sacrifice increases affective well-being this is not necessarily the case (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). For example, attributions about the motives behind the favor may lead to positive emotions of gratitude or negative feelings of indebtedness.

Interdependence theory typically focuses on situations when partners are together and have to coordinate joint actions. We also studied affective well-being when partners are not together for two reasons. First, these situations can be used as a comparison standard for goal congruent and goal-incongruent situations when partners are together. In this way, we can examine whether goal-congruence enhances affective well-being or whether goal-incongruence undermines well-being in comparison to typical levels of affective well-being. Second, individuals' actions can be congruent or incongruent with their partner's goals even when their partner is not present.

In sum, we examined the influence of three factors on affective well-being, namely (a) whether partners are spending time together or not, (b) whether an activity meets the actor's goals (the actor is the partner whose well-being is assessed) and (c) whether an activity meets the goals of the actor's partner. These three factors create eight situations. These situations are described in Table 1 with a prototypical example for each situation.

In situations when individuals are not together with their partner (scenarios 5–8 in Table 1), intrapersonal goal theories predict higher well-being when individuals pursue their own goals (scenarios 5 and 6) than when they are not pursuing their own goals (scenarios 7 and 8) (Brunstein, 1993; Diener, 1984; King, 2008; Lazarus, 1991). These theories do not consider the influence of partners' goals. Also, they do not predict how pursuing only a partner's goal will influence well-being (scenario 7 in Table 1).

In situations when individuals are together with their partner (scenarios 1–4), they should experience higher affective well-being than when they are not with their partner. This prediction is consistent with previous findings (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004; Oishi, Diener, Scollon, & Biswas-Diener, 2004) and theories of human values and motives that postulate a need for affiliation (McClelland, 1985; Murray, 1938). Although need fulfillment increases general feelings of pleasure and happiness, fulfillment of distinct needs also produces distinct emotions. Emotions like affection, warmth, intimacy, and closeness signal that intimacy needs are being met (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). Thus, we propose that the presence of the partner predicts more intense feelings of closeness and that these feelings of closeness contribute to affective well-being because the fulfillment of intimacy needs is pleasurable (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989).

However, interdependence theory suggests that the presence of the partner is not sufficient to fulfill intimacy needs. Rather, feelings of closeness in the presence of a partner are influenced by more complex appraisal processes (Lazarus, 1991), and depending on these appraisal processes, people may feel hurt and distant from a partner when intimacy needs are not fulfilled (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gere & MacDonald, 2010). Interdependence theory suggests that goal-incongruence is one factor that moderates the influence of being with a partner on feelings of closeness and affective well-being. For example, strong insistence on one's own goals by one partner ("I want my way!") may make the other partner feel neglected and hurt ("Don't you care about me?") (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In contrast, engaging in activities that further both partners' goals can elicit strong feelings of closeness because these situations highlight the congruent aspects of the two partners (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, we predicted that partners experience the highest feelings of closeness and affective well-being when they are together and engaged in a goal-congruent activity (scenario 1 in Table 1).

In contrast to goal-congruent situations, it is possible to distinguish two types of goal-incongruent situations. In one situation, the activity meets the actor's goal, and does not meet the partner's goal (i.e., the partner sacrifices) (scenario 2 in Table 1). In the other situation, the activity does not meet the actor's goals and meets the partner's goals (i.e., the actor sacrifices) (scenario 3 in Table 1). One interesting question that we wanted to examine is whether these two incongruent situations have different effects on affective well-being and closeness. Intrapersonal goal theories might suggest that actors have higher affective well-being when the partner sacrifices because they get to pursue their own goals. However, interdependence theory suggests that awareness of not meeting a partner's goals can undermine the actor's own affective well-being, although situations with incongruent goals elicit complex cognitive and emotional processes that can moderate these effects (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

It is noteworthy that our conceptualization of the relationship between intimacy feelings and affective well-being differs from Kahneman et al.'s (2004) approach. Kahneman et al. (2004) included ratings of feeling warm/friendly in the positive affect component of well-being. We think that it is problematic to do so because feeling warm/friendly is only one of many specific emotions that can contribute to one's overall level of positive affect. By including warmth in the measure of affective well-being and excluding other positive emotions (e.g., pride), the affective well-being indicator is biased towards situations that elicit affection. For this reason, we prefer to measure affective well-being with more basic emotions, such as happiness or cheerfulness that reflect whether a situation is appraised as positive or negative for one's own well-being (Lazarus, 1991; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). In support of our approach, Schimmack (2003) found that affection was correlated with life satisfaction, but made no unique contribution to life satisfaction after controlling for feelings of happiness.

In sum, our study brings together several lines of research that have examined affective well-being from different perspectives within a single integrative framework. The key feature of this framework is to distinguish three factors that create eight different types of situations that can influence the affective well-being of

Table 1
The eight situations defined by actor's goals, partner's goals, and partner's presence.

Goals met	Situation description	Example
With partner		
1. Both partners' goals	Both partners have a goal that can be met through engaging in a single joint activity together	The partners go for a walk in the forest together (meets actor's goal to be more active and partner's goal of connecting with the environment)
2. Actor's goals	The partners engage in an activity that only meets the actor's goals, but not the partner's goals	Actor wants to go to the bookstore to buy a new book and asks his/her partner to come along; the partner wants to stay home and watch TV, but comes along to make actor happy
3. Partner's goals	The partners engage in an activity that only meets the goals of the partner, but not the goals of the actor	Actor wants to spend quality time with partner, partner wants to visit his/her family and actor agrees to see partner's family to make partner happy
4. Neither actor's nor partner's goals	Neither the goals of the actor nor the goals of the partner are being met	Actor and partner both want to sleep in, but take their child to a play-date
Without partner		
5. Both partners' goals	The actor is not with the partner but is engaged in an activity that meets both his/her own goals and also the goals of the partner	One partner stops on the way home from work to pick up take-out for dinner (meets both partners' goal of eating dinner)
6. Actor's goals	The actor is not with the partner and is engaged in an activity that meets his/her own goals and not the partner's	Actor wants to read a book and reads without their partner (meets actor's goal of reading a book, does not meet partner's goal)
7. Partner's goals	The actor is not with the partner, but he/she is engaged in an activity that meets the partner's goals and not his/her own goals	Partner ran out of his/her shampoo and asks actor to pick it up on the way home, so actor buys it for his/her partner (does not meet actor's own goals, meets partner's goal of getting the shampoo)
8. Neither actor's nor partner's goals	The actor is not with the partner and is doing something that does not meet either his/her own or the partner's goals	Actor completes a report that his/her boss asked for (does not meet actor's or partner's goals)

individuals in close relationships (Table 1). Our key prediction is that affective well-being is strongest in goal-congruent situations when both partners are engaged in a shared activity. The high level of affective well-being in this situation is not merely due to the main effects of our three situational factors. Rather, we predict that this situation elicits intense experiences of closeness and that these experiences of closeness at least partially account for the high level of affective well-being in these situations.

2. Study 1

In Study 1, we used an experience sampling methodology (Schimmack & Diener, 2003; Scollon, Kim-Prieto, & Diener, 2003). The use of this methodology allowed us to investigate the goal congruence of participants' activities, their emotions, and feelings of closeness to their partner as they occur, which avoids memory biases associated with retrospective recall of these activities (Scollon et al., 2003). The use of this methodology also allowed us to sample a wide range of activities and has high ecological validity because assessment occurs as participants go about their day-to-day lives (Schimmack & Diener, 2003; Scollon et al., 2003). Another advantage of experience sampling methodology is that the repeated assessment of activities over time gives the design high statistical power to detect even small to moderate effects. In contrast to most experience sampling studies that rely on single individuals (Larson & Almeida, 1999), we recruited married couples and both spouses participated in the experience sampling study.

2.1. Methods

2.1.1. Participants

Married couples (n = 113) living in the Greater Toronto Area were recruited for this study through advertising in local newspapers. The analyses are limited to 97 couples who completed the 14-day experience sampling part of the study. Wives were 37.4 years of age on average (SD = 11.3, range = 21–69) and husbands were 40.3 years of age (SD = 12.3, range = 23–74). Couples were married for an average of 9.9 years (SD = 10.0, range = 0.2–42 years). The sample reflected the ethnic diversity of the area: for the wives, 23.7% were Western European, 20.6% were South Asian, 12.4% were Eastern European, 10.3% were East Asian, and the remaining 33.0% of the wives were of other backgrounds. Of the husbands, 29.9% were Western European, 21.6% were South Asian, 11.3% were Eastern European, 9.3% were East Asian, and the remaining 27.9% were of other backgrounds. Many of the couples were also highly educated; most completed college/university (65.0% of wives, 60.9% of husbands) or had post-graduate or professional degrees (16.5% of wives, 21.7% of husbands). The remainder of the sample had some college education (6.2% of wives, 7.2% of husbands), completed high school (11.3% of wives, 9.3% of husbands), or had some high school education (0% of wives, 1.0% of husbands).

2.1.2. Procedures

Participants came into the laboratory, completed a number of intake questionnaires, and also filled out a schedule, in which they indicated what time periods they were likely to be together with their partner and what time periods they were unlikely to be with their partner. After they completed all of the questionnaires, both the wives and the husbands were given personal digital assistants (PDAs). The researchers explained to the participants how to use the PDAs, how to fill out the reports when they were signaled, and how often and when they could expect to be signaled.

Couples took the PDAs home for a period of 2 weeks, during which they were signaled six times per day at approximately 2–3 h intervals. Daily start and end times varied for each participant, and were adjusted to their reports of when they were likely to be awake. Based on the schedules provided by each participant, each day, they were signaled three times during a time period when they indicated that they were likely to be together with their partner and another three times when they indicated that they were not likely to be with their partner. After the 2 weeks, participants came back to the laboratory and returned their PDAs and filled out another series of questionnaires. The questionnaires will not be discussed further because this study focuses on the ESM data only (for a more detailed description of the larger study see Pinkus et al., 2008).

Participants completed a total of 15,882 reports in response to 18,984 signals, representing an 84% response rate (7945 reports were completed by wives, 7937 reports were completed by husbands). On average, each participant responded to 82 signals (SD = 8.4, range = 58–147). Participants reported that they were together with their partner on 8642 reports (54% of total) and were not with their partner on 7233 reports (46% of total; on 7 signals

information about the partner's presence was missing). Each participant was together with their partner on an average of 45 signals (*SD* = 13.2, range = 11–83) and was not with their partner on an average of 37 signals (*SD* = 12.8, range = 3–85). This confirms that, as expected, approximately half the signals occurred when participants were together with their partner, whereas the other half occurred when participants were not together with their partner. It is important to realize that we did not use random sampling of situations. As a result, mean levels of our measures are imperfect measures of individual's overall affective well-being during the 14-day period.

2.1.3. Experience sampling questionnaire

Each time participants were signaled, they answered a series of questions. First, participants reported on their feelings. For each emotion, on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*maximally*), they rated to what extent they felt happy/cheerful, angry/irritated, worried/anxious, and sad/blue. These four items were used to create a composite measure of affective well-being by subtracting the average of the three negative affect items from the happiness/cheerfulness item. Thus, higher scores on this measure correspond to higher affective well-being; that is, experiencing more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions.[1] This index is based on the assumption that happiness is a core affect that accompanies more specific positive emotions (Reisenzein, 1995) and the finding that happiness ratings are the best predictor of life satisfaction (Schimmack, 2003). As negative emotions are more differentiated (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987), the measure includes three negative emotions that represent a basic level in hierarchical models of affect (Shaver et al., 1987). All three of the included negative emotions tend to be similarly related to life satisfaction (Schimmack, 2003). Studies with a broader range of emotions show good convergent validity with other measures of affect balance (Schimmack, Schupp, & Wagner, 2008). Aggregates of this measure also show common levels of self-informant agreement (Gere & Schimmack, in press). Participants had a mean affective well-being score of 2.8 (*SD* = 1.4, range = −2.6 to 5.9).

Participants also rated how close they felt to their partner at the time of the signal on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very close*). Similar self-ratings of how close people feel to another person have been commonly used in prior research (Aron et al., 1992; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1999). Participants reported a 4.7 mean feeling of closeness to their partner (*SD* = 1.3, range = 1.0–6.9; the zero-order correlation between ratings of affective well-being and closeness was $r = .49$, $p < .01$). Next, they indicated whether they were together with their partner or not. Lastly, participants were asked a single question about the goal that motivated the activity that they were engaged in at the time of the signal and were provided with four response options. The exact question stem was "My current activity fulfills:" with the following response options: "my goals and my partner's goals," "my goals, NOT my partner's goals," "my partner's goals, NOT my goals," and "neither my goals nor my partner's goals." On average, participants reported pursuing both their own and their partner's goals on 40 signals (*SD* = 20.9, range = 0–92), only their own goals on 21 signals (*SD* = 16.7, range = 0–80), only their partner's goals on 2 signals (*SD* = 4.0, range = 0–30), and neither their own nor their partner's goals on 18 signals (*SD* = 18.1, range = 0–78).

2.1.4. Data analysis

All analyses were conducted using the Mplus 5 statistical software package (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). The data were analyzed with a multi-level model with experiences nested within individuals. In addition, dyadic data are not independent (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). To account for these two levels of dependence in our data we used the TYPE = COMPLEX TWOLEVEL command in MPLUS (Muthén & Muthén, 2007, p. 222). In this model, cluster is used to adjust standard errors for dependencies within couples, and the TWOLEVEL command is used to account for dependencies of repeated observations within individuals.

The variables of closeness and affective well-being were centered around each person's mean for the analysis (group-mean centering).[2] By group centering both variables, individual differences in mean levels of affective well-being and feelings of closeness were eliminated, so that any observed effects of the goal variables are independent of differences between individuals on their average levels of affective well-being and feelings of closeness to their partner.

Participants' responses to the questions on whose goals the activity served and whether they were together with their partner were used to create seven dummy variables. Three dummy variables represented the three main effects: activity meets own goals (0 = no, 1 = yes), activity meets partner's goals (0 = no, 1 = yes), and presence of the partner (0 = no, 1 = yes). Three dummy variables represented the two-way interactions: activity meets own goals and partner's goals (0 = no, 1 = yes), activity meets own goals while being with the partner (0 = no, 1 = yes), and activity meets the partner's goals while being with the partner (0 = no, 1 = yes). Finally, the last dummy variable represented the three-way interaction: activity meets both own goals and partner's goals while being with the partner (0 = no, 1 = yes). In statistical terms we predict a significant three-way interaction. This three-way interaction is tested by testing the significance of the dummy variable that codes the three-way interaction because it shows that the three-way interaction predicts unique variance in the dependent variable above and beyond the main effects and two-way interactions.

To test mediation, we ran a multivariate model with closeness and affective well-being as dependent variables. Both dependent variables were regressed onto all seven dummy variables coding the eight situations. In addition, affective well-being was regressed on closeness because the mediation model assumes that closeness contributes to affective well-being. We used the model indirect command (Muthén & Muthén, 2007) to get parameter estimates for the direct, indirect, and total effects of situations on affective well-being. As a result, it was not necessary to run a separate model without closeness to get the parameter effects for the total effects.

Regression coefficients for dummy variables are not particularly meaningful because they depend on the coding of variables. To make sense of the results, it is more meaningful to use the regression weights to compute means on a dependent variable for different levels of the predictor variables. We computed the estimated means for the eight situations using the NEW parameter command of the MODEL CONSTRAINT option in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). We also requested and used an output of parameter estimates with confidence intervals using the CINT command. As a result, we were able to obtain confidence intervals for the estimated means of the eight conditions based on the direct effects of situations on closeness and the total effects of situations on affective well-being. One advantage of confidence intervals is that it simplifies comparisons of means in a complex interaction analysis. Rather than conducting numerous post hoc tests, readers can simply examine whether confidence intervals of a set of means overlap or not. If two confidence intervals do not overlap, the two means

[1] The results follow the same pattern when analyzed separately for positive emotions and negative emotions as the pattern of results for affective well-being. Thus for the sake of brevity we present only the results for affective well-being rather than the separate results for positive affect and negative affect.

[2] The main results of the analysis remain unchanged when the variables are not centered.

are significantly different from each other. However, traditional significance tests based on *p*-values for the regression parameters are still needed to make inferences about the significance of main effects, two-way interactions, and the theoretically important three-way interaction.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Closeness

The standardized model parameters, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals of the goal variables predicting feelings of closeness are presented in Table 2. The results showed a main effect for being with partner. The only significant two-way interaction was a negative effect of pursuing only actor's goals in the presence of partner. Importantly, the three-way interaction was significant, showing that the effect of being with a partner on closeness is qualified by actor's and partner's goals. Fig. 1 shows the mean levels of closeness that are implied by the regression weights in Table 2.[3] Given that feelings of closeness were group-centered around each person's own mean, it is not possible to interpret zero values in any meaningful way, just like the overall mean in analyses with raw scores is usually not interpretable. Effect sizes in Fig. 1 show the unstandardized differences on the 0–6 rating scale. Given an overall standard deviation of 1.3 and the fact that between-subject variance accounts for a relatively small portion of the variance in momentary affect data (Schimmack, 2003), these values are also reasonable estimates of standardized effect sizes.

Consistent with our predictions, pursuing a goal-congruent activity with a partner produced higher levels of closeness than in any other situation. The confidence intervals show that this situation differed significantly from all other situations. A comparison of the goal-incongruent situations shows that simply being with a partner did not produce higher levels of closeness in these conditions (e.g., pursuing own goal's with or without a partner) and the conditions did not differ from one another regarding feelings of closeness. This might be because effects of sacrifice on affective well-being are moderated by approach and avoidance motives. However, closeness was higher when partners were together and pursued neither partner's goals. For now, it is important that the most salient feature of the pattern in Fig. 1 is that one of the eight situations produced high levels of closeness. As predicted, this is the condition when partners are together pursuing congruent goals.

2.2.2. Affective well-being

The standardized parameter estimates, standard errors, and 95% confidence intervals of the total effects (as well as the parameter estimates of the direct and indirect effects) of the goal variables on affective well-being are presented in Table 3.[4] First, the results show a significant effect of closeness. Given the significant effects of situations on closeness shown earlier, this finding is consistent with our hypothesis that closeness partially mediates the effects of situations. If closeness mediated all of the situation effects, none of the dummy variables should be significant predictors of affective well-being when closeness is also a predictor. However, we found several significant effects that are not mediated by our closeness measure. First, we found a significant main effect for pursuing own goals. This is consistent with intrapersonal goal theories. We also found a significant main effect for being together with the partner. However, these main effects have to be interpreted with caution given significant two-way and three-way interactions. To make sense of this complex pattern of effects it is useful to examine the pattern of means for the total effects (combining mediated and direct effects) in Fig. 2. As the standard deviation for affective well-being including between subject variance was 1.4, the values can be roughly interpreted like standardized effect sizes. The most salient result is that affective well-being was higher when partners were together in a goal– congruent situation than in any of the other seven situations. Fig. 2 also shows that in incongruent situations, actors' affective well-being was higher when they pursued their own goals rather than pursuing their partner's goals. This was the case when the partners were together and when they were not together. As this pattern was not observed for closeness, these effects are likely to reflect intrapersonal processes; namely engaging in activities that meet own goals can increase affective well-being.

Table 2
Path coefficients, standard errors, and confidence intervals for each goal variable predicting feelings of closeness.

	β	SE	Confidence interval
Main effects			
Partner's goal	−.024	.134	−.288 to .239
Actor's goal	.192	.078	.039 to .345
With partner	.443	.090	.266 to .620
Two-way interactions			
Both goals (partner x actor goals)	.031	.147	−.258 to .320
With partner × actor goals	−.343	.103	−.545 to −.142
With partner × partner's goals	−.189	.141	−.466 to .087
Three-way interaction			
With partner × both goals	.590	.179	.239 to .941

Although not significant (confidence intervals overlap), Fig. 2 also suggests that pursuing own goals without a partner is associated with slightly higher affective well-being than doing so in the presence of a partner. This could be due to the fact that the presence of a partner constrains goal pursuit or that being the beneficiary of a sacrifice elicits negative feelings of indebtedness.

Finally, in situations that fulfill neither partner's goals, affective well-being was higher when partners were together than when they were not together. This pattern matches the results for closeness and suggests that closeness partially accounted for this finding.

We completed our test of mediation by examining the significance of the indirect effects. Most important, we were interested in the significance of the indirect effect of the dummy variable that codes the three-way interaction. As predicted, the indirect effect was significant (.281, $p = .001$). However, Table 3 already showed that the direct effect was also significant, indicating that our results only provide evidence for partial mediation. One explanation for partial mediation is that we used a single item indicator to measure closeness and measurement error in the mediator attenuates indirect effects. An alternative explanation could be that the activities in these situations were intrinsically more pleasurable than activities in other situations. Nevertheless, our demonstration of a significant indirect effect provides support for our hypothesis that goal congruence during shared activities elicits feelings of closeness and that these feelings enhance affective well-being.

3. Study 2

Study 2 addressed two limitations of Study 1. First, in Study 1, we used a novel, single-item measure of actor's and partner's goals. In Study 2, we examined the validity of the single-item measure of goals in two ways: we asked participants to list actual activities they have engaged in with their partner for each of the four goal categories, and we asked participants to rate several reasons for

[3] The results for feelings of closeness do not differ by the sex of the participant, thus we present the results for the two sexes combined.

[4] The results for affective well-being do not differ by the sex of the participant, thus we present the results for the two sexes combined.

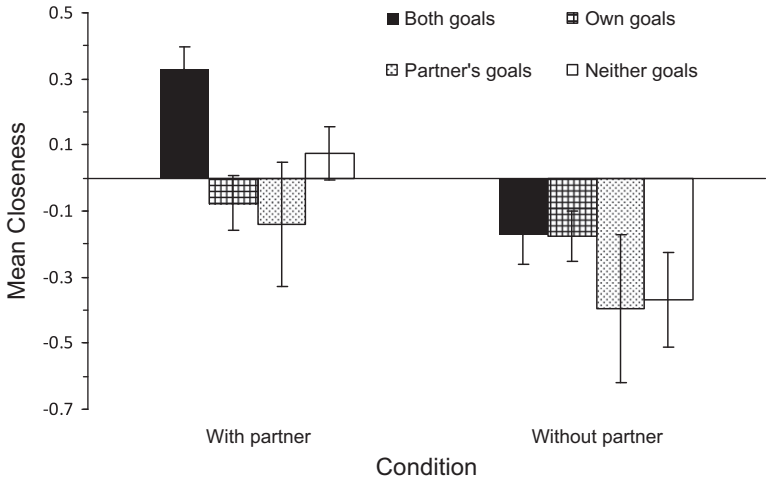

Fig. 1. Feelings of closeness means for each of the goal situations with 95% confidence intervals.

Table 3
Path coefficients, standard errors, and confidence intervals for total affective well-being and path coefficients for direct and indirect affective well-being for closeness and each goal variable.

	Total B	Total SE	Total Confidence interval	Direct β	Indirect β
Mediator					
Closeness	.476	.026	.425 to .527	.476	–
Main effects					
Partner's goal	.014	.131	−.243 to .270	.025	−.012
Own goal	.326	.078	.172 to .480	.235	.091
With partner	.246	.074	.100 to .392	.035	.211
Two-way interactions					
Both goals (partner × own goals)	−.156	.142	−.435 to .123	−.171	.015
With partner × own goals	−.380	.092	−.560 to −.200	−.217	−.163
With partner × partner's goals	−.538	.186	−.903 to −.174	−.448	−.090
Three-way interaction					
With partner × both goals	1.072	.214	.653 to 1.490	.791	.281

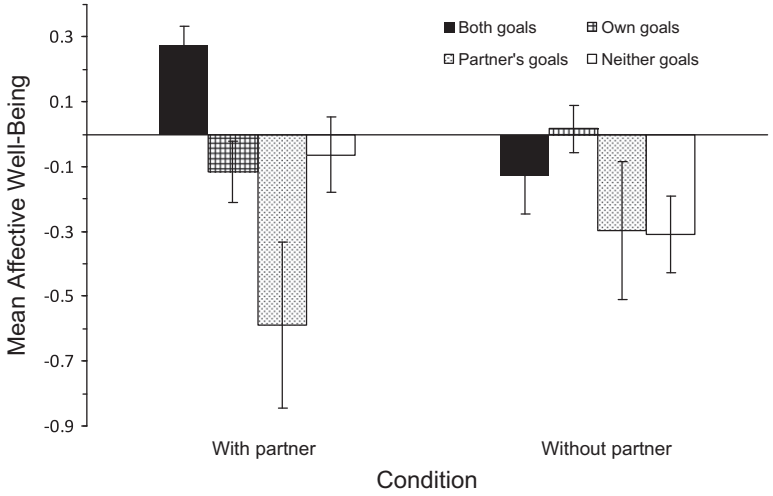

Fig. 2. Affective well-being means for each of the goal situations with 95% confidence intervals.

engaging in each activity. By examining more closely the types of activities listed in Study 2, we were able to examine how participants interpreted the meaning of our goal question in Study 1. Our measure is valid if participants in Study 2 are able to retrieve everyday examples that match our four goal categories and if they can provide meaningful answers to our questions about the reasons for taking part in these activities.

Another limitation of Study 1, common to all experience-sampling studies, was that our predictor variables can be confounded with other situational factors that influence affective well-being.

For example, activities that fulfill both partners' goals could be more pleasurable than activities that further only one spouse's goal. To address this limitation, in Study 2 we held the type of activity constant by asking participants to recall autobiographical memories of actual activities they have engaged in with their partner that corresponded to each of the four goal categories and obtained ratings of typical enjoyment of the activity with the partner and without the partner. We predicted that an activity with congruent goals would be rated as more enjoyable with the partner than the same activity without the partner. We recruited dating couples to examine whether the results of Study 1 are limited to married couples or whether they generalize to relationships of shorter duration and commitment.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

Fifty-six (28 male, 28 female) undergraduate students who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of Toronto at Mississauga were recruited for this study. Participants were recruited as couples as part of a larger study of satisfaction in dating couples. Women were 18.5 years of age on average (*SD* = 0.6, range = 18–20) and men were 19.3 years of age (*SD* = 1.3, range = 18–22). None of the participants were married or living together with their partner. They were involved in a romantic relationship with their partner for an average of 13 months (*SD* = 12.10, range = 2–47 months). Regarding ethnic background, 39% of the women and 50% of the men were Asian, 25% of the women and 29% of the men were European, and 36% of the women and 21% of the men were of other backgrounds.

3.1.2. Procedures

Partners from each couple came into our lab together and filled out a series of questionnaires in separate rooms. We asked them to recall four activities they engaged in with their partner that corresponded to the four goal-pursuit situations in Study 1. More specifically, they were instructed to recall activities that met both partners' goals, met only one's own goals, met only the partner's goals, and met neither one's own nor the partner's goals. For example, the question about both partners' goals read "Please remember an activity in which you and your partner did something together that met *both your goals and your partner's goals*. Please describe what you did together *and what goals the activity met for each of you*." For each question, only the italicized parts were changed to specify each of the different goal situations. After participants described the activity, they rated it on a variety of dimensions on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Specifically, participants rated how much they typically enjoy the activity with and without their partner, how likely it is that they would have done the activity without their partner, how much they engaged in the activity because they wanted to be with their partner, and how much they engaged in the activity because they wanted to enjoy their time with their partner. We also asked them more specific questions about partner-related motives for engaging in these activities. In particular, they rated how much they wanted (1) to make their partner happy, (2) to avoid their partner getting angry at them, and (3) to avoid feeling guilty.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Activities listed

First, we examined the types of activities that people listed for each of the four goal categories. After examining the activities participants listed, seven coding categories were created. The activities were then coded into one of the seven categories by two independent coders (83% agreement): school-related activities (e.g., studying together), work-related activities (e.g., going for a job hunt together), leisure activities (e.g., eating out, going to a movie), intimacy activities (e.g., sexual activities), spending time with each other's friends or family (e.g., going to a family gathering), doing chores together (e.g., going shopping together for winter boots), or other activities that do not fit into the previous categories (e.g., doing something for someone else). Disagreements between the coders were resolved through discussion.

The frequency of use for each activity type in each of the goal categories is presented in Table 4. The most frequently listed activities for all of the goal categories were leisure activities, followed by school-related activities. Spending time with one another's friends and family was also common but the remaining categories were mentioned less frequently. We tested whether the distribution of activity types listed differed across the four goal categories, but found no significant differences between them, χ^2 (27) = 19.61. Given that the distribution of activity types listed across the goal categories is similar, it is unlikely that differences in participants' average ratings across the four goal categories are mainly due to differences in the type of activities that meet or do not meet both partners' goals.

3.2.2. Validity of goal question

Our validation measures were analyzed using multi-level models with individuals nested within dyads to control for independence of dyadic data. Three dummy variables representing the goal categories (actor's goal, partner's goal, both goals) were created with neither partner's goals used as the reference category. To ease interpretation, we converted the regression results into means for the goal categories and calculated 95% confidence intervals to be able to contrast the three goal categories (non-overlapping confidence intervals mean significant differences between the goal categories).

One validity question asked participants to rate the likelihood that they would engage in the activity without their partner. Results showed clear evidence that participants understood our goal questions. Participants reported higher likelihood that they would pursue own-goal activities (*M* = 4.75, *SE* = 0.35, CI [4.05, 5.44]) than partner-goal activities (*M* = 2.36, *SE* = 0.35, CI [1.67, 3.06]) when they are without their partner; goal-congruent activities fell in the middle (*M* = 3.95, *SE* = 0.45, CI [3.08, 4.82]). This pattern shows that participants are less interested in activities that meet partner's goals and that engaging in these activities is a sacrifice according to the conception of sacrifice in interdependence theory. The slightly lower mean for the congruent goal activities also suggests that higher affective well-being during these activities is not due to the activities per se, but reflects the benefits of engaging in these activities with a partner.

Two items examined avoidance motivation for sacrifices (Impett et al., 2005). Participants reported the highest levels of wanting to avoid making their partner angry or wanting to avoid feeling guilty for activities that met only the partner's goals (*M* = 3.44, *SE* = .32, CI [2.80, 4.07] and *M* = 3.47, *SE* = .35, CI [2.78, 4.16] respectively) and the lowest levels in the activity that met only their own goals (*M* = 2.13, *SE* = .24, CI [1.66, 2.59] and *M* = 2.11, *SE* = .31, CI [1.51, 2.71] respectively), with activities that met both partners' goals in the middle (*M* = 2.52, *SE* = .27, CI [2.00, 3.04] and *M* = 2.52, *SE* = .32, CI [1.90, 3.14] respectively).

We also asked about approach motivation for sacrifices. Participants were most focused on trying to make their partner happy when the activity met only the partner's goals (*M* = 6.04, *SE* = .28, CI [5.48, 6.59]) or both their own and their partner's goals (*M* = 5.61, *SE* = .24, CI [5.13, 6.08]). They were least concerned with making their partner happy when the activity met only their own goals (*M* = 3.71, *SE* = .38, CI [2.96, 4.46]).

Table 4
Percent of category use for each goal activity.

	Both partners' goals met (%)	Only actor's goals met (%)	Only partner's goals met (%)	Neither partners' goals met (%)
Leisure	50	38	40	53
School	27	20	20	9
Family/friends	13	20	25	11
Chores	2	9	5	13
Intimacy	4	5	4	2
Work	2	2	4	4
Other	4	5	2	8

Finally, we asked participants how much they wanted to be with their partner. This goal was higher for goal-congruent activities ($M = 5.90$, $SE = .30$, CI [5.32, 6.47]) and for activities that met only the partner's goals ($M = 5.75$, $SE = .25$, CI [5.25, 6.24]) than for activities that met only their own goals ($M = 4.65$, $SE = .27$, CI [4.13, 5.18]). This finding suggests that pursuing partner's goals is not always a sacrifice for the sake of a partner, but can also be the result of an intrapersonal goal conflict in which the goal to be with a partner is more important than pursuing a desirable activity.

Our results show that participants in Study 1 are likely to have sacrificed pursuing their own interests and engaged in activities that met only their partner's goals for a number of reasons, including approach motivated and avoidant motivated sacrifice (Impett et al., 2005). It is likely that these motives moderate the effects of sacrifices on affective well-being in Study 1 (Impett et al., 2005). The results support previous findings that even individuals who engage in activities that meet their partner's goals because they want to make their partner happy, do recognize that the activity does not meet their own goal, although wanting to make a partner happy is their own goal. This finding shows that they understand the meaning of our question and are able to evaluate activities from multiple perspectives; a self-focused perspective based on an evaluation of the activity per se, and a relationship-focused perspective that focuses on intimacy needs and the consequences of actions for the partner and the relationship.

3.2.3. Activity enjoyment

Our main prediction was that activities are enjoyed most in the company of the partner and when the activity is congruent with the goals of both partners. The pattern of means in Table 5 is consistent with our hypothesis.[5] To test statistical significance, we used Mplus to fit a mean-structure model to the data (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). This analysis is essentially identical to a traditional planned contrast analysis, but Mplus allowed us to account for the dyadic nature of the data by using the cluster command to adjust the standard errors of the parameter estimates (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). We fitted a mean structure with main effects for being with the partner (no = 0, yes = 1), pursuing actor's own goals (no = 0, yes = 1), and pursuing the partner's goals (no = 0, yes = 1), all two-way interaction terms and the three-way interaction term. Given the coding of our data, a positive three-way interaction term indicates a unique positive contribution of engaging in a shared goal-congruent activity on enjoyment. As predicted, the three-way interaction term was significant and positive (.68, $SE = .20$, $p < .01$).

3.3. Discussion

In sum, Study 2 successfully addressed two limitations of our first study. First, we showed that participants correctly understood the meaning of our goals question. That is, they understood that pursuing activities that met only their own goals meant that they would be more likely to engage in these activities even if they were not with their partner and they focused less on their partner in these situations. They also clearly indicated that pursuing activities that met only the partner's goals were sacrifices that they made, as they reported lower likelihood of pursuing these activities alone or if their actions were not guided by a concern for the partner. Study 2 also revealed that one reason for sacrifice was individuals' desire to spend time with their partner. In this case, sacrifice is not motivated by concern for partners' well-being, but rather by self-interested desire to fulfill intimacy needs. These situations are still sacrifices in the sense that individuals sacrifice pursuing activities they would like to do, but they are not sacrifices for the sake of the partner. Similarly, avoidance motives like avoiding feeling guilty are responsive to a partner's goals. Even approach motives may be motivated by long-term benefits for the sacrificing individual because sacrifices can have benefits in the long-run. In this regard, it would be difficult to define sacrifices in terms of the motives and cost and benefit analysis underlying sacrifices. It is much easier to focus on whether activities match individuals' interest in these activities and their individualistic goals independent of the congruence or incongruence with partner's goals. Our results suggest that it is most advantageous to avoid sacrifices and to focus on activities that both partners find enjoyable. Moreover, we find that these situations are not only beneficial because individuals get to engage in activities they enjoy while enjoying the company of their partner. Rather, jointly pursuing shared goals seems to elicit particularly high levels of enjoyment.

Table 5
Enjoyment ratings of goals activities.

	With partner		Without partner	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Both partners' goals	6.23	0.99	3.80	1.71
Own goals only	5.49	1.39	4.16	2.13
Partner's goals only	5.13	1.60	2.91	2.07
Neither partners' goals	5.32	1.78	3.55	2.03

4. General discussion

In sum, we examined how goals relate to affective well-being for individuals who have to coordinate their actions with a relationship partner. In Study 1, jointly pursuing goal-congruent activities was associated with higher levels of affective well-being (i.e., higher positive affect and lower negative affect) and this relation was partially mediated by feelings of closeness, which were particularly strong during these situations relative to all other situations. In Study 2, engaging in goal-congruent activities with a partner was associated with the highest reports of enjoyment. In both studies, these effects were observed over and above the main effects of spending time with the partner and of being able to pursue own goals. The convergent findings across different populations, and relationships suggest that our findings are robust. Although replication studies are needed, our results suggest that affective

[5] The results for ratings of enjoyment do not differ by the sex of the participant, thus we present the results for the two sexes combined.

well-being can be enhanced by pursuing goal-congruent activities with a partner. The actual activities can be quite mundane. What matters appears to be more that they are perceived as congruent and elicit feelings of closeness.

5. Limitations

There are several limitations of our studies that need to be addressed in future research. Many of our couples in Study 1 were highly educated and the dating couples in Study 2 were university students. This limits the generalizability of our results and the findings need to be replicated with samples that are more representative of the general population.

Another limitation of our studies is that alternative explanations of our results are possible. In Study 1, it is possible that ratings of goals were influenced by respondents' feelings. That is, they were more likely to perceive goals as congruent when they were feeling close to their partner. However, this confound did not exist in Study 2. In Study 2, it is possible that results were influenced by memory biases, but this confound did not exist in Study 1. Moreover, our interpretation of the results is consistent with experimental evidence that seeing others as instrumental to one's own goals increases feelings of closeness (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Thus, there is convergent evidence across paradigms to support our theory that engaging in goal-congruent activities elicits feelings of closeness.

In Study 1, we found evidence that closeness partially mediated the effects of goal congruence on affective well-being. Mediation models do not prove causality and it remains possible that reverse causality and shared method variance inflated our estimates of the effects of closeness on affective well-being. Future research needs to use more reliable measures and control for systematic measurement error to provide stronger tests of mediation. At the same time, feelings of happiness are commonly reported when individuals recall episodes in which they experienced love (Shaver et al., 1987) and it seems rather uncontroversial to suggest that situations that fulfill a need for affiliation enhance well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Indeed, we were more surprised to find that mediation was only partial. As noted before, one possible explanation is that measurement error in our mediator variable weakened the indirect path through feelings of closeness. Another explanation is that Study 1 did not control for the type of activities and partners may have engaged in more enjoyable activities when they pursued goal-congruent activities together. Study 2 showed, however, that this confound does not fully explain our findings in Study 1. Future research should try to control for the type of activities or hold the type of activities constant. Future studies should also improve the measurement of constructs to obtain stronger tests of mediation.

Finally, our study relied on self-ratings of goals, feelings of closeness, and affective well-being. The study was designed to obtain reports when partners were together on half of all assessments. However, partners did not always respond at the same time and some of the eight situations were reported rarely. As a result, we ended up with too few occasions to conduct dyadic analyses. Future research should obtain more concurrent reports to examine agreement and disagreement in goal ratings. Although emotions are more directly based on individuals' perceptions of social situations (appraisals), we expect that romantic partners know about each other's personal interests and goals and will often recognize when a partner sacrifices.

6. Theoretical implications

Kahneman et al.'s (2004) influential article has stimulated renewed interest in situational influences on affective experiences (Flügel, 1925). The focus on situational factors has provided valuable information about social-ecological factors that influence affective well-being that complements appraisal theories of emotions. However, our research suggests that it would be a mistake to ignore appraisals and goals in studies of affective well-being. The reason is that situational effects are mediated and moderated by cognitive appraisals of these situations (Lazarus, 1991). It is simply not enough to find out that on average individuals tend to report higher well-being when they are with their spouse than when they are with their boss or alone. Goals need to be incorporated in theories of affective well-being because they explain why individuals engage in activities and how activities influence people's affective well-being. We showed that spending time with a partner is most beneficial when partners pursue congruent goals. These situations seem to have a unique ability to enhance affective well-being. One area of future research is whether this effect is unique to romantic relationships or common to other close relationships. Neurological studies show overlap between romantic and maternal parental love (Bartels & Zeki, 2004). It is therefore possible that parents and children also experience closeness and increased affective well-being when they engage in shared activities. The lower affective well-being reported in the presence of children (Kahneman et al., 2004) may reflect the fact that parents spend more time in goal-incongruent activities with their children.

Our work on goal congruence also complements recent research on sacrifice (Impett & Gordon, 2008). Although in our studies we found that sacrificing (pursuing only partner's goals) predicted lower affective well-being, the sacrifice literature suggests that there are likely to be important moderators of this effect. For example, Impett et al. (2005) demonstrated that people sacrifice for different reasons and that approach-motivated sacrifice can have positive effects, whereas the opposite is true for avoidance-motivated sacrifices. It will be important to use experience sampling methodology in the future to examine whether these different types of motives also produce different in-the-moment emotional experiences.

Furthermore, existing studies in the relationships literature regarding interpersonal influences on goal pursuit have examined stable individual differences in the provision of goal support and related constructs. For example, some researchers have examined the link between relationship satisfaction and the partner's social support for one's goals (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010; Rafaeli, Cranford, Green, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008). Similarly, others have focused on a partner's responsiveness to one's needs (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), on compassionate goals, which reflect a genuine concern for the partner (Crocker & Canevello, 2008), and on communal orientation, which reflect non-contingent responsiveness to a partner's needs (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004). These studies show that these factors are related to higher levels of relationship satisfaction. We believe that one reason for these findings is that individuals with a communal orientation (or compassionate goals, or responsiveness) are more likely to be in goal-congruent situations or to perceive situations as goal-congruent. In this regard, we do not think that these variables moderate our findings, but rather that our situational effects mediate the positive effects of dispositions on well-being.

Another avenue for future research is to examine how relationship partners' goals change over the course of a relationship. As the relationship develops, partners may adopt new goals that are more congruent with their partner's goals and may place less importance on goals that are incongruent with their partner's goals. However, stable personality dispositions are likely to place constraints on individuals' ability to abandon goals that produce goal incongruence. In this regard, it is puzzling that similarity in personality traits is such a weak predictor of relationship satisfaction

(Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010). One possible explanation is that relationship partners pursue incongruent goals independently. Consistent with this idea, participants in Study 1 reported most of the time that they were engaged in goal-congruent activities. This suggests that similarity is only important to the extent that it promotes goal-congruence. Future research should examine in more detail how couples with dissimilar personalities solve potential conflicts when they are faced with incongruent goals.

In sum, we found that goal congruence is an important contributor to affective well-being in romantic relationships. We hope that our findings will encourage more interpersonal research on goals and well-being and lead to a much richer understanding of the influence of social relationships on goal pursuit and well-being. Although personality psychology has traditionally focused on intrapersonal processes, we think that personality psychology can benefit from expanding its scope by taking the interdependence of closely related individuals into account.

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Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at doi:10.1016/j.jrp.2011.06.010.

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