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# The unique contributions of motivations to maintain a relationship and motivations toward relational activities to relationship well-being

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**Abstract** People experience autonomy when they perceive their behaviour to be volitional rather than driven by external controls. Previous research has studied autonomy in relationships at a general level, focusing on people's motivations to maintain their romantic relationships, as measured by the Couple Motivation Questionnaire (CMQ; Blais et al., J Personal Soc Psychol 59:1021–1031, 1990). To supplement the CMQ, we developed the Motivations for Relational Activities (MRA) scale, which assesses the extent to which people feel autonomous and controlled in a variety of specific relational activities. The purpose of this study is to examine the unique contributions of general motivations to maintain a relationship (CMQ) and motivations toward specific relational activities (MRA) in the prediction of relationship well-being. Results showed that the MRA and CMQ both independently and significantly contributed to the prediction of relationship well-being (i.e., commitment, intimacy, satisfaction, and vitality within the relationship) and were differentiated by their associations to dimensions of personality and attachment.

**Keywords** Self-determination theory · Romantic relationships · Motivation · Emotion · Relative autonomy · Autonomy · Relationship satisfaction · Intrinsic motivation · Extrinsic motivation · Self-regulation · Attachment · Personality

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## Introduction

Across varied perspectives, motivation for behaviour has typically been conceptualized and measured as a dispositional tendency or as a context-specific orientation. Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan 2000) organizes these motivational dispositions or orientations by the extent to which behaviour is characterized as being relatively autonomous or volitional versus controlled. When autonomy and control have been assessed as general personality orientations toward self-regulation or as general motivational orientations to engage within specific life domains (e.g., education, close relationships, health behaviour), the more that people feel autonomous, the greater their well-being and the more positively they function in a given domain, while the more controlled they feel in their behaviour, the lower their well-being and the poorer their functioning within a domain (see Deci and Ryan 2000 for review).

While dispositional and domain-specific orientations provide useful information in the prediction of well-being and personal functioning, it is possible that motivations within a given domain may be further differentiated and this information may add to the prediction of functioning. Specifically, in the domain of romantic relationships, people's overall motivation to maintain a relationship may be different than their motivations to engage in activities of the relationship. Also, people may willingly stay in their romantic relationships but they may be differentially motivated toward distinct activities within their romantic relationships, willingly engaging in some relational activities yet engaging in other activities only because they are pressured or obligated to do so. Importantly, how people are motivated toward specific relational activities may be vital both to functioning within that activity and to overall

relationship well-being (Feeney and Collins 2003), and as such, distinguishing motivations for different activities may be vital to understanding functioning uniquely within a given activity as well as the relationship as a whole. Thus, the purpose of this study is to model motivations to maintain the relationship and motivations to engage in specific relational activities as related but distinct predictors of relationship functioning and well-being. We turn now to the SDT perspective on motivation and specifically examine the supporting literature in the domain of romantic relationships.

## Autonomy: A self-determination theory perspective

Self-determination theory proposes that people possess an innate psychological need for autonomy—i.e., they have a need to perceive themselves as the origin or source of their own behaviour (deCharms 1968; Deci 1975). The need for autonomy is satisfied when people experience their behaviour as volitional or willingly engaged, rather than driven by rewards or pressures. Research has shown that the more autonomous people are, the greater their personal well-being, as marked by greater life satisfaction, vitality, higher and more secure self-esteem, as well as lower risk for depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms (Deci and Ryan 2002; Ryan and Deci 2001; Kernis and Paradise 2002). Greater autonomy has also been linked to positive interpersonal functioning, such as less defensiveness and more positive and honest social interactions (Hodgins et al. 1996). Specifically, in the context of romantic relationships, research has shown that greater relative autonomy is associated with more open communication, greater facility in conflict resolution, as well as greater couple happiness (Blais et al. 1990; Knee et al. 2005, 2002).

SDT defines a person's motivational orientation toward behaviours along a continuum of autonomy (see Deci and Ryan 2000 for illustration of this continuum). There are three general categories of motivation, including intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation (Ryan and Connell 1989). *Intrinsic motivation* is considered to evidence the greatest degree of autonomy as it is activity pursued because of interest or pleasure in the activity itself. In the context of romantic relationships, an example of intrinsic motivation is when individuals spend time with their partner because they find their interactions with their partner to be stimulating and exciting.

*Extrinsic motivation* reflects instrumental behaviour, in which action is aimed at producing some desired outcome that is separable from the activity itself. While early conceptualizations of extrinsic motivation portrayed it as invariably controlled (deCharms 1968), SDT distinguishes several different forms of extrinsic motivation that are conceptualized to differ in the extent to which they are experienced as pressured versus volitional (Deci and Ryan 2000). The four forms of extrinsic motivation outlined by SDT are external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. *External regulation* involves behaving to obtain external rewards or to avoid punishments; thus, behaviour is elicited by direct external contingencies. For example, people who are externally regulated to spend time with their partner might only do so to gain favours from their partner or to avoid the nagging or anger of their partner. *Introjected regulation* refers to behaviour that serves an internalized value that has not been personally endorsed by the individual. The behaviour is internally regulated by intrapsychic pressures to maintain self-worth or to avoid guilt. Since the value is not personally endorsed or "owned", the behaviour is experienced as controlled. An example of introjected regulation is when individuals spend time with their partner because they feel it is their obligation to do so and they would feel guilty if they did not fulfill their role of being a "good" relationship partner. That is, in such cases individuals spend time with their partner because they feel that they "should". *Identified regulation* refers to behaviour that serves a personally endorsed value or goal. In identified regulation, individuals take "ownership" for their behaviour and act with a sense of willingness or choice. While the behaviour is extrinsically motivated (i.e., it serves a particular value or goal), it is experienced as autonomous since the perceived locus of causality is the individual's own endorsed value. An example of identified regulation is when individuals spend time with their partner because the interactions serve some personally endorsed value, such as increasing intimacy or sharing experiences. Finally, *integrated regulation* refers to when the value served by a particular behaviour is integrated with other values and goals of the self. That is, the behaviour fits coherently with other important aspects of the self, which is not necessarily the case with identified regulation. Integrated regulation is regarded as the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation because it involves the experience of acting from an integrated set of personal values and goals.

The third general category of motivation is *amotivation*. When amotivated, a person perceives a desired outcome as not being contingent on his or her behaviour or the person lacks the ability to produce the behaviour. An example of amotivation is when individuals disengage from their partner because emotionally sharing with their partner yields no response or engagement by their partner.

Because each person potentially has many different reasons for engaging in any behaviour, motivation is indexed by a combination of these regulatory orientations. These combinations have been achieved in different ways, with some studies (e.g., Deci and Ryan 1985) indexing motivation by broad orientations (e.g., autonomous,

controlled, and amotivation), whereas other studies use a weighted combination of all regulatory styles into a relative autonomy index (RAI; e.g., Ryan and Connell 1989). We turn to the literature on romantic relationships to illustrate how these indices have been used to predict personal and relational functioning.

First, motivation has been assessed as a general personality disposition to self-regulate and seek opportunities for self-regulation across different domains. In the SDT tradition, the General Causality Orientation Scale (GCOS; Deci and Ryan 1985) is used to measure people's general tendencies toward autonomous, controlled, and impersonal behaviour regulation in a variety of life-domains. The autonomous orientation involves regulating behaviour on the basis of interests and self-endorsed values (i.e., intrinsic, identified, integrated regulation), the controlled orientation involves regulating behaviour on the basis of external pressures and directives to behave (i.e., external, introjected regulation), and the impersonal orientation reflects feelings of ineffectance in behaviour (i.e., amotivation). Research has shown that the autonomous orientation is associated with less self-derogation, greater ego development, and higher self-esteem, while the controlled orientation is associated with an external locus of control (i.e., the belief that one cannot control outcomes), Type-A personality pattern, and greater public self-consciousness (Deci and Ryan 1985). The impersonal orientation is associated with an external locus of control as well as greater self-derogation, public self-consciousness, depression, social anxiety, and lower self-esteem (Deci and Ryan 1985).

Motivation has also been measured in specific domains (e.g., education, interpersonal relationships, health behaviour) by assessing people's perceived motivations to engage in specific behaviours and activities within the domain. In these specific domains, relative autonomy is typically measured by assessing people's perceived reasons for engaging in a behaviour or activity using the Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ; adapted by domain). Reasons consistent with each regulatory style (amotivation, external, introjected, identified, and integrated regulation, and intrinsic motivation) are rated and averaged within each regulation style, and then a RAI is calculated by weighting each regulation score by its degree of autonomy (3 intrinsic motivation + 2 integrated regulation + 1 identified regulation − 1 introjected regulation − 2 external regulation − 3 amotivation). Research using the SRQ suggests that greater relative autonomy for engaging in specific activities is generally associated with improved performance, greater persistence, engagement, and well-being in the activity domain (e.g., Ryan and Connell 1989). With regard to romantic relationships, the Couple Motivation Questionnaire (CMQ; Blais et al. 1990) was developed to assess the degree to which people are involved in their romantic relationships for relatively autonomous reasons. In a sample of married couples, results showed that that the greater people's relative autonomy to maintain their relationship, the more positive their relationship functioned, as indicated by greater agreement and affection between partners, as well as greater couple happiness (Blais et al. 1990).

Notably, hierarchical models of motivation (see Vallerand 1997) suggest that people's behavior in a particular domain is a consequence of both their general motivational dispositions as well as specific contextual motivations. Several recent studies have together addressed this proposition. First, Knee et al. (2002) investigated whether trait autonomy (as measured by the GCOS) influences how couples cope with and respond to conflict within the partnership. Results showed that the more people are autonomous overall the more they show active coping, openness and attempts to understand their partner, as well as less avoidance of their problems within their romantic relationship, while the more people felt controlled overall, the more they denied problems in their relationship and expressed emotions through venting. Additionally, when observing partners while they discussed discrepant viewpoints, the autonomy orientation was related to more positive interaction behaviours, such as approach, clarification, and attempts to understand the partner, whereas the control orientation was associated with displaying fewer of these positive interaction behaviours. In sum, it seems that feeling greater autonomy overall is associated with greater openness and flexibility in romantic relationships, whereas feeling more controlled overall is related to a more closed, avoidant, and less positive approach to conflict. Knee et al. (2005) then tested whether people's motivations to maintain their relationships (as measured by the CMQ) mediated the association between trait autonomy and relationship functioning. Knee et al. demonstrated partial mediation such that trait autonomy (i.e., general autonomy orientation) allows one to have more open and less defensive responses to conflict in part because trait autonomy promotes autonomous reasons for maintaining the relationship. In sum, this finding provides evidence that relational functioning is best predicted by understanding both dispositional as well as contextually specific motivations.

## Measuring motivation toward relational activities

Both Blais et al. (1990) and Knee et al. (2005) measured relative autonomy toward the relationship using the CMQ, which assesses the willingness with which people maintain involvement in their relationship as a whole, or in other words, estimates a general disposition towards willingly

maintaining the relationship. This general orientation however potentially does not capture whether people approach the various tasks of the relationship with the same degree of autonomy as they do the relationship as a whole. Moreover, it would seem that people can potentially be differentially motivated toward distinct activities within their romantic relationships. For example, a person may willingly engage in physical intimacy, yet provide social support only because of pressure from his or her partner to do so. Thus, in line with a hierarchical conceptualization of motivation (Vallerand 1997), a broader definition of motivation in relationships might consider both global motivations (i.e., reasons for involvement) as well as specific motivations (i.e., reasons for engaging in activities of the relationship), with motivation toward the relationship as a whole and toward specific activities both possibly carrying unique implications for effective functioning within the relationship (Feeney and Collins 2003).

## The present study

The purpose of the current study is to assess the potentially unique contributions of general motivations to maintain a relationship and motivations toward specific relational activities in the prediction of relationship well-being. To do this, we first developed a scale that assesses romantic partners' motivations to engage in a variety of important relational activities. The Motivations for Relational Activities (MRA) scale assesses motivations toward relational activities within romantic relationships, including sexual intimacy, physical intimacy, self-disclosure, social support, instrumental support, niceties, and support for the life aspirations of one's partner.

The relational activities of the MRA were selected to provide a relatively comprehensive set of the activities essential to most romantic relationships. Physical intimacy is a central and perhaps defining activity in romantic relationships. We included separate subscales for sexual intimacy and physical intimacy (i.e., hugging, kissing, cuddling) as these two activities are related but distinct and have each been related to closeness and relationship well-being (Andersen 1985; Birchler and Webb 1977; Cupach and Comstock 1990; Emmers and Dindia 1995; Guerrero and Andersen 1991; Haavio-Mannila and Kontula 1997; Lawrance and Byers 1995). We included self-disclosure as it has been shown to be essential for the development of closeness in relationships (Finkenauer and Hazam 2000; Hendrick 1981; Laurenceau et al. 1998; Meeks et al. 1998). We also included various forms of support that have been shown to be important to personal and relationship functioning, including social support (i.e., emotional support; Uchino et al. 1996) and instrumental support (Wills et al. 1974), support for the partner's life aspirations or goals (Kasser 2002; Kasser and Ryan 1996; Sheldon et al. 2004), and niceties (i.e., doing special things for partner; Belk and Coon 1993; Huang and Yu 2000).

Using structural equation modeling, we examine the associations between the CMQ and indices of the MRA and then test the relative contributions of the MRA and the CMQ to relationship well-being. We expected that the CMQ and MRA represent related but distinct measures of relationship motivations, and that motivations to maintain a relationship (CMQ) and motivations to engage in relational activities (MRA) will each independently predict relationship well-being (including measures of commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within the relationship).

Finally, we assume that the CMQ and MRA measures will reflect unique constructs. If this assumption is supported by the models proposed, we wanted to further explore how these two measures might differ by examining their correlations to dimensions of personality and attachment. Research has shown that greater trait autonomy (as measured by the GCOS) is associated with lower Neuroticism, and higher Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Hmel and Pincus 2002), and further, when autonomy is supported within a relationship, greater attachment security in that relationship is in evidence (La Guardia et al. 2000). Given this research, we expect that greater autonomy in the relationship will be associated with a more adaptive personality pattern (i.e., lower Neuroticism and higher Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness) as well as lower attachment anxiety and avoidance, yet how the two measures of relationship motivation (CMQ, MRA) each uniquely relate to these dimensions remains an empirical question that will be further explored.

## Methods

### Participants and procedure

Two hundred and forty-six undergraduate students (112 men, 134 women) who were currently involved in romantic relationships completed questionnaires online in exchange for either course credit or a free movie pass. The average age of the participants was 19.5 years (range 17–43 years, SD = 3.05). The participants were predominantly White and Asian (58% White, 24% Asian, 5% East Indian, 3% Middle Eastern, 10% other) and most (96%) were in heterosexual romantic relationships. The majority of participants (81%) were in exclusive dating relationships (i.e., a committed dating relationship with one partner), while the remaining participants were dating casually (8%), engaged (7%), married (2%), dating more than one partner (1%), or

did not specify their relationship status (1%). Eleven percent of the participants were currently living with their partner and 49% reported that their relationship was "long-distance". Participants reported that they had been romantically involved with their partner for a mean of 1.54 years (SD = 1.65 years, range 1 month to 15.2 years).

## Measures

### *Couple Motivation Questionnaire*

The CMQ (Blais et al. 1990) assesses people's reasons for maintaining involvement in their current romantic relationships. It contains six subscales: amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation, and intrinsic motivation. The CMQ begins with the stem, "Why do you presently stay in your relationship with your partner?" and 21 items provide reasons for generally maintaining the partnership. Participants indicate the extent to which each item corresponds to their reasons for relationship involvement using a Likert-type scale, ranging from "not at all true" (1) to "very true" (7). Sample items include "There is nothing to motivate me in maintaining my relationship with my partner" (amotivation), "Because my partner insists that we stay together" (external regulation), "Because I would feel guilty if I separated from my partner" (introjected regulation), "Because life with my partner offers me the opportunity to learn how to better communicate my ideas" (identified regulation), "Because I value the way my relationship with my partner allows me to improve myself as a person" (integrated regulation), and "Because I love the many fun and crazy times I share with my partner" (intrinsic motivation). Subscale scores are calculated by taking the average rating of the reasons belonging to each regulatory style. Then the RAI is computed by weighting each of the regulatory styles (3 intrinsic motivation + 2 integrated regulation + 1 identified regulation − 1 introjected regulation − 2 external regulation − 3 amotivation), such that higher scores indicate greater relative autonomy for maintaining the relationship. The internal reliability of the RAI in the current sample was .82, which was computed using the formula for the reliability of a weighted composite [composite reliability $= 1 - [(\sum\ b_i^2\ \text{variance}_i\ (1 - r_{ii}))/\text{variance}_c]$ where $b$ = weighting of regulatory style (i.e., −2, −1, 0, 1, 2), $i$ = regulatory style (e.g., external regulation), $r_{ii}$ = reliability of each regulatory style, and $c$ = RAI].

### *Motivations for Relational Activities scale*

For this study we developed the MRA to assess external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and intrinsic motivation for eight relational activities, including sexual intimacy, physical intimacy, self-disclosure, social support, instrumental support, niceties, and support for partner's life aspirations (see the "Appendix" for scale items).[1] The *sexual intimacy* subscale assesses people's motivations to engage in sexual activities such as petting, oral sex, and intercourse. The *physical intimacy* subscale assesses people's motivations to hug, kiss, and cuddle with their partner. The *self-disclosure* subscales separately assess people's motivations to disclose their feelings and to disclose their thoughts and concerns to their partner. The *social support* subscale assesses people's motivations to listen to their partner's problems (i.e., emotional support). The *instrumental support* subscales separately assess people's motivations to help solve their partner's problems and to do things that might reduce stress in their partner's life. The *niceties* subscale assesses people's motivation to do special things for their partner, including giving gifts, calling their partner, and taking their partner out. Finally, the support for partner's *life aspirations* subscale assesses people's motivations to support their partner's life goals, such as education, career, hobbies, family, and/or lifestyle choices. Each activity subscale begins with a stem that describes a targeted activity (e.g., physical intimacy) and then presents a series of different reasons for engaging in the activity. Participants rate the extent to which each reason corresponds to why they engage in the target activity, using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "not at all true" (1) to "very true" (7). The range of reliabilities for each regulatory style across activities ranged from .58 to .77 (external regulation), .58 to .76 (introjected regulation), .66 to .85 (identified regulation), and .71 to .84 (intrinsic motivation). The derivation of the final scale scores is discussed further in the "Results".

### *Relationship well-being*

Several constructs representing relationship well-being were assessed, including intimacy, commitment, satisfaction, and vitality within the relationship. *Intimacy* within the relationship was measured by the Personal Assessment

[1] Amotivation toward relational activities is excluded from the MRA since it uniquely reflects disengagement from behaviour, whereas the other regulatory styles involve intentional and regulated behaviour. We also excluded integrated regulation toward relational activities from the MRA because we judged that integration might not be adequately assessed through self-report measures since the construct would require individuals to consider how specific relational activity motivations fit within their larger self-system, including aspects of themselves in domains other than relationships. Notably, the MRA measures motivations to engage in relational activities but does not measure motivations to *not* engage in those activities. It is possible for someone to have autonomous or controlled reasons to not engage in a particular behaviour. However, we chose to assess only reasons to engage in activities to make the MRA comparable to the CMQ in orientation.

of Intimacy in Relationships (PAIR; Schaefer and Olson 1981). The scale contains 24 items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include, "This person listens to me when I need someone to talk to", "This person helps me clarify my thoughts", "We have an endless number of things to talk about". The average of the 24 items serves as the intimacy score. *Commitment* to the relationship was measured by Rusbult's (1980) commitment measure, which contains five items rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Sample items include, "To what extent are you committed to your relationship?", "To what extent are you "attached" to your partner?", and "For what length of time would you like your relationship to last?" The average of the five items provides the commitment score. *Satisfaction* in the relationship was measured by the State-Relationship Questionnaire, Trait Form (O'Connor et al. 1999). The scale provides 24 positive and negative adjectives that participants rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale according to either how they usually feel toward their partner (e.g., "Connected", "Interested", "Irritated", "Distant") or how their partner usually makes them feel ("Understood", "Content", "Rejected", "Unappreciated"). The satisfaction score is the difference between the average ratings of the positive adjectives and the negative adjectives. *Vitality* within the relationship was measured by Ryan and Frederick's (1997) vitality measure, adapted for relationships. The scale contains five items, rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, concerning how participants feel when they are with their partner. Sample items include, "When I am with my partner, I feel alive and vital", "When I am with my partner, I feel energized", and "When I am with my partner, I look forward to each new day". The average of the five items indicates the level of vitality for the relationship. Reliabilities for these scales in the current sample were .86, .82, .95, and .89, respectively.

### *Attachment*

Adult romantic attachment was measured by the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan et al. 1998). The scale consists of 36 items that assess individual differences in the dimensions of attachment anxiety (i.e., the extent to which people are insecure versus secure about the extent of their partner's availability and responsiveness) and attachment avoidance (i.e., the extent to which people are uncomfortable being close to others versus secure depending on others). The items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale according to how participants generally experience romantic relationships, not just with their current partner. Sample items assessing attachment anxiety include, "I worry about being abandoned", "I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them", and "I worry about being alone".

**Table 1** Means and SD of Couple Motivation Questionnaire indexes, relationship well-being indexes, attachment anxiety and avoidance dimensions, and Big Five personality traits ($N = 246$)

| | *M* | SD |
|---|---|---|
| Couple Motivation Questionnaire | | |
| Amotivation | 1.73 | 1.01 |
| External regulation | 3.38 | .96 |
| Introjected regulation | 2.93 | 1.14 |
| Identified regulation | 4.62 | 1.26 |
| Integrated regulation | 3.57 | 1.19 |
| Intrinsic motivation | 5.68 | 1.03 |
| Relative autonomy index | 13.92 | 7.44 |
| Relationship well-being | | |
| Intimacy | 5.41 | .77 |
| Commitment | 6.02 | 1.07 |
| Satisfaction | 3.80 | 1.66 |
| Vitality for relationship | 5.58 | 1.07 |
| Attachment | | |
| Anxiety | 3.46 | 1.07 |
| Avoidance | 2.61 | 1.08 |
| Big Five traits | | |
| Neuroticism | 3.83 | 1.07 |
| Extraversion | 4.68 | .87 |
| Openness | 4.56 | .80 |
| Agreeableness | 4.86 | .84 |
| Conscientiousness | 4.71 | .90 |

Sample items assessing attachment avoidance include, "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down", "I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close", and "I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back". The anxiety and avoidance dimensions are computed by taking the average of the relevant scale items (see Table 1 for the means and SD of scores). The internal reliabilities of these scores in the current sample were .90 (anxiety) and .94 (avoidance).

### *Big Five personality dimensions*

Personality was measured by the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa and McCrae 1992). The scale contains 60 items that measure five personality dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The Neuroticism dimension reflects the tendency to experience negative emotions and is defined by facets of anxiety, hostility, depression, self-consciousness, impulsiveness, and vulnerability, and contrasts that with relative adjustment and emotional positivity. The Extraversion dimension contrasts the tendencies to be sociable, outgoing, and excitement-seeking with the tendencies to be reserved and independent. The Openness dimension

contrasts the tendencies to be curious and unconventional with the tendencies to be closed to new experiences, conventional, and conservative. The Agreeableness dimension contrasts the tendencies to be altruistic and sympathetic with the tendencies to be disagreeable, antagonistic, skeptical, and competitive. The Conscientiousness dimension contrasts the tendencies to be purposeful, strong-willed, and determined with the tendencies to be lackadaisical and disorganized (Costa and McCrae 1992). The scores for each personality dimension were computed by taking the average of the relevant items for each subscale (see Table 1 for the means and SD). The internal reliabilities of each personality dimension in the current sample were .85 (Neuroticism), .81 (Extraversion), .69 (Openness), .77 (Agreeableness), and .83 (Conscientiousness).

## Results

### Preliminary analyses

A preliminary step was to explore the factor structure of the MRA subscales to derive the appropriate indices of motivation. First, for each relational activity, we entered the regulatory style subscales pertaining to that activity into a principal components factor analysis with a varimax rotation (see Table 2 for the factor loadings). Within each activity, the data suggested that the regulatory styles were clustered into two factors, reflecting *autonomous activity motivation* (identified regulation and intrinsic motivation were highly positively correlated and loaded on one factor) and *controlled activity motivation* (external and introjected regulation were highly positively correlated and loaded on another factor). Given these factor loadings, within each activity we computed a score for autonomous activity motivation (created by taking the mean of identified regulation and intrinsic motivation ratings) and a score for controlled activity motivation (created by taking the mean of the external and introjected regulation ratings). Table 3 shows the means and SD of scores for autonomous and controlled motivation within each activity.

Next, we examined the intercorrelations among autonomous activity motivation scores across all activities and the intercorrelations among controlled activity motivation scores across all activities. Intercorrelations of autonomous activity motivation were moderate and positive, suggesting that the more people feel autonomously engaged in one activity, the more they also report feeling autonomous in other relational activities (above the diagonal in Table 4).[2]

[2] The exception to this pattern was autonomous activity motivation toward sexual intimacy, which was less clearly associated with autonomous motivation toward the other activities. However, when we tested the SEM models presented later in the paper and allowed autonomous motivation for sexual intimacy to contribute uniquely to relationship well-being outcomes rather than load on the autonomous motivation latent factor, the model fit was poor. Thus, in the final analyses, it was included as an indicator of the autonomous motivation latent factor along with the other activity scales.

**Table 2** Factor loadings of regulatory styles on factors of controlled activity motivation and autonomous activity motivation for each relational activity ($N = 246$)

| | Controlled activity motivation | | Autonomous activity motivation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | External regulation | Introjected regulation | Identified regulation | Intrinsic motivation |
| Sexual intimacy | .94 | .83[a] | .84 | .91 |
| Physical intimacy | .82 | .86[a] | .86 | .85 |
| Disclosure (feelings) | .89 | .89 | .93 | .93 |
| Disclosure (thoughts) | .88 | .90 | .95 | .94 |
| Social support | .83 | .87[a] | .92 | .92 |
| Instrumental support (problems) | .86 | .86 | .89 | .80 |
| Instrumental support (stress) | .92 | .77[a] | .89 | .88 |
| Niceties | .93 | .87[a] | .90 | .90 |
| Life aspirations | .90 | .93 | .92 | .88 |

[a] Introjected regulation also loaded on autonomous activity motivation factor at .37 (sexual intimacy), .29 (physical intimacy), .24 (social support), .45 (instrumental support-stress), and .29 (niceties). Given that these loadings were below .60, we retained the factors as illustrated above

**Table 3** Means and SD of MRA autonomous and controlled motivation scores by relational activity ($N = 246$)

| Relational activity | Autonomous motivation *M* (SD) | Controlled motivation *M* (SD) |
|---|---|---|
| Sexual intimacy | 5.19 (1.09) | 2.35 (1.00) |
| Physical intimacy | 5.84 (.96) | 2.45 (1.00) |
| Disclosure of feelings | 5.69 (1.12) | 3.24 (1.18) |
| Disclosure of thoughts | 5.62 (1.09) | 2.37 (1.12) |
| Social support | 6.21 (.83) | 3.47 (1.14) |
| Instrumental support (problems) | 4.89 (1.09) | 3.55 (1.15) |
| Instrumental support (stress) | 5.63 (.99) | 3.36 (1.17) |
| Niceties | 5.76 (1.05) | 3.33 (1.12) |
| Support of life aspirations | 5.58 (.99) | 3.48 (1.36) |

**Table 4** Intercorrelations among autonomous motivation scores (above diagonal) and intercorrelations among controlled motivation scores (below diagonal) across relational activities ($N = 246$)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Sexual intimacy | | .42 | .17[1] | .24 | .19 | .15[1] | .33 | .22 | .24 |
| 2. Physical intimacy | .72 | | .42 | .35 | .48 | .33 | .45 | .36 | .40 |
| 3. Disclosure (feelings) | .53 | .62 | | .78 | .67 | .44 | .56 | .47 | .53 |
| 4. Disclosure (thoughts) | .51 | .57 | .74 | | .68 | .57 | .63 | .50 | .63 |
| 5. Social support | .51 | .57 | .66 | .62 | | .54 | .64 | .50 | .62 |
| 6. Instrumental (problems) | .55 | .57 | .61 | .62 | .74 | | .64 | .36 | .60 |
| 7. Instrumental (stress) | .48 | .61 | .62 | .60 | .70 | .73 | | .63 | .64 |
| 8. Niceties | .51 | .58 | .64 | .59 | .67 | .69 | .70 | | .62 |
| 9. Life aspirations | .40 | .50 | .55 | .43 | .56 | .61 | .60 | .67 | |

All correlations significant at the $p < .01$ level, except values superscripted with "1" which are significant at $P < .05$ level

A similar pattern of intercorrelations emerged for controlled activity motivation (below the diagonal in Table 4), suggesting that the more people feel pressured or coerced in one activity, the more they also report feeling pressured or coerced to engage in other relational activities. Notably, for both of the matrices described, people's motivations across activities were moderately correlated overall, which suggests that their motivations toward different activities are not completely redundant and thus should be modeled as separate indicators.

## CMQ and MRA in the prediction of relationship well-being

Both the CMQ and the MRA measure people's relationship motivations. A central question, then, is whether these scales provide unique or overlapping information for the prediction of relationship well-being. To examine the comparability of the CMQ and the MRA in the prediction of relationship well-being, we modeled the CMQ and MRA as latent variables predicting a latent variable representing relationship well-being (Figs. 1, 2). The CMQ latent variable represents the relative autonomy score (see Table 1 for the means and SD of the CMQ subscales and relative autonomy score). Given that the MRA factor structure was consistent with two relatively independent factors of autonomous activity motivation and controlled activity motivation, we modeled the autonomous and controlled scores separately, such that the autonomous activity motivation scores were modeled as indicators of an autonomous activity motivation latent variable and the controlled activity motivation scores were modeled as indicators of a controlled activity motivation latent variable.[3] The relationship well-being latent variable represents the common factor that explains people's scores on commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within the relationship (see Table 1 for means and SD of these variables).

Multiple-group analysis in AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle 2007) was used to analyze data from men and women simultaneously. The model was evaluated for its goodness of fit using indices including the Generalized Likelihood Ratio (CMIN), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), with criteria for a reasonably well-fitting model of CMIN/$df < 2.5$, CFI $> .90$, and RMSEA $< .08$.

Examination of these fit indices suggested that the postulated model did not closely fit the observed correlations (CMIN = 1,092.99, $df = 450$, $p < .001$, CMIN/$df = 2.43$, CFI = .83, RMSEA = .077). We speculated that the lack of fit was due to certain activities of the MRA being highly related to each other (e.g., sexual and physical intimacy), resulting in highly correlated motivations toward these activities. We therefore allowed correlated errors between three pairs of activities in order to explain commonalities between these activities that were not captured by the autonomous activity motivation and controlled activity motivation latent factors. The chosen pairs were sexual intimacy and physical intimacy (both involve physical closeness), disclosure of feelings and disclosure of thoughts (both involve self-disclosure), and social support and instrumental support of problems (both activities emphasize helping one's partner cope with problems). The

[3] We also modeled the MRA as a one-factor model in which autonomous activity motivation scores and controlled activity motivation scores were indicators of a single latent factor. This factor would represent "relative autonomy" if the autonomous activity motivation scores loaded positively and the controlled activity motivation scores loaded negatively. When we tested this model in AMOS, the autonomous activity motivation scores loaded positively but the controlled activity motivation scores loaded poorly on the factor. Further, the model fit was very poor (CMIN = 3,247.91, $df = 456$ CMIN/$df = 7.12$, CFI = .47, RMSEA = .132), suggesting that a one-factor model of the MRA is inappropriate.

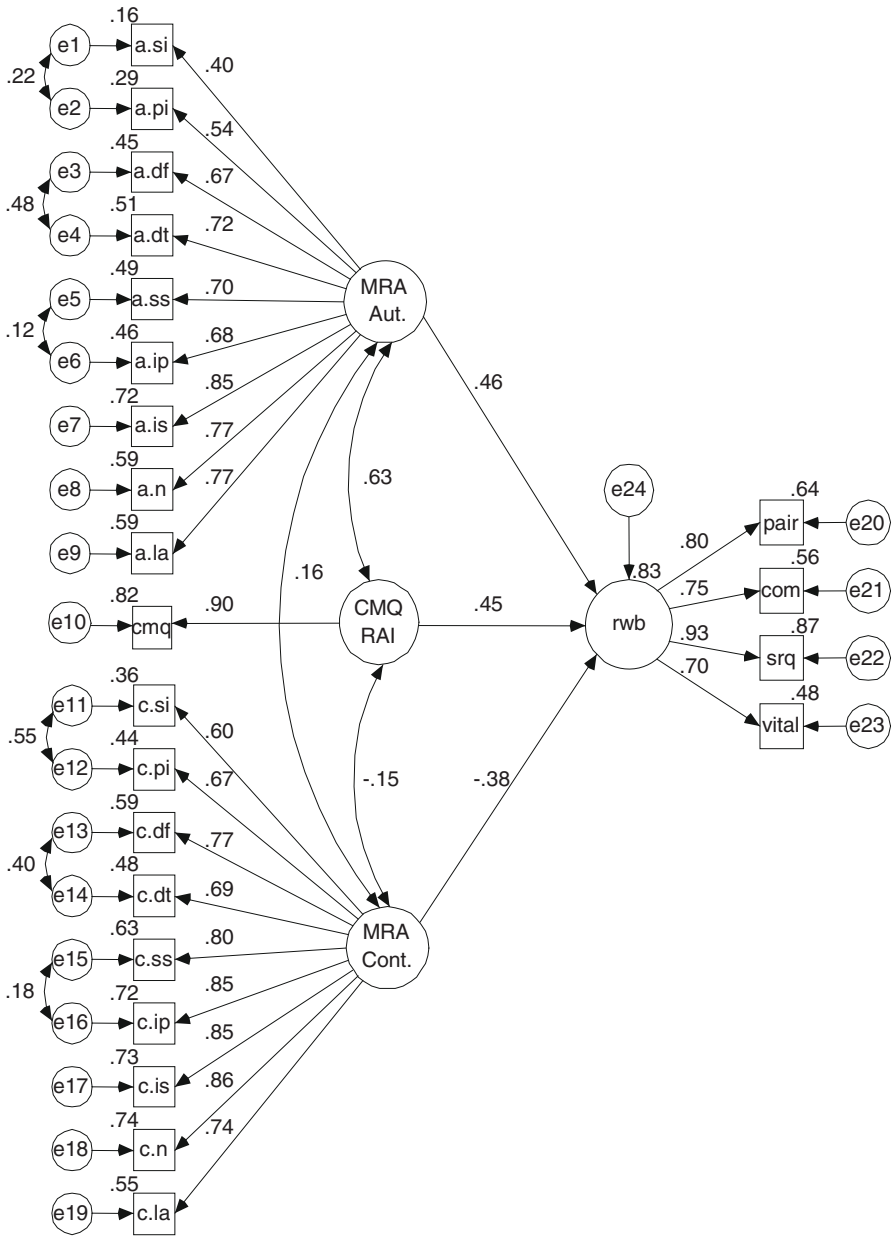


**Fig. 1** Motivation to maintain the relationship and motivation toward relational activities predicting relationship well-being for men

*MRA Aut. = Autonomous activity motivation; MRA Cont. = Controlled activity motivation; CMQ RAI = CMQ Relative Autonomy Index; rwb = relationship well-being; pair =Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships; com = Commitment; srq = State-Trait Relationship Questionnaire; vital = Vitality; a. = autonomous motivation subscale; c. = controlled motivation subscale; si = Sexual Intimacy; pi =Physical Intimacy; df =Disclosure of Feelings; dt =Disclosure of Thoughts; ss = Social Support; ip = Instrumental Support (Problems); is = Instrumental Support (Stress); n = Niceties; la =Support of Partner's Life Aspirations*

inclusion of these correlated errors substantially improved model fit, as evidenced by the change in CMIN [1,092.99 (450) − 908.94 (438) = 185.05, $df = 12$, $p < .001$], and resulted in acceptable fit with the observed correlations (CMIN = 908.94, $df = 438$, $p < .001$, CMIN/$df = 2.08$, CFI = .88, RMSEA = .066).

To assess whether there were differences between men and women on parameter estimates we set some parameters

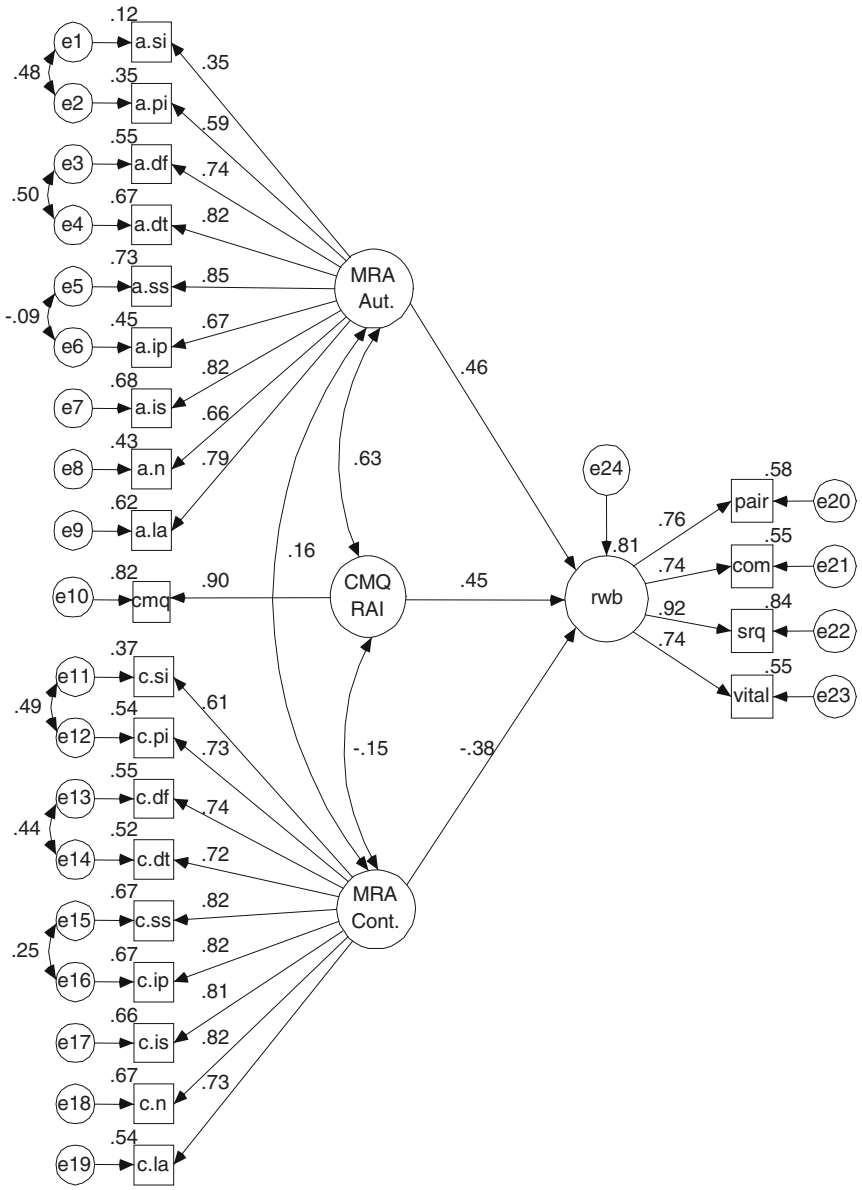


**Fig. 2** Motivation to maintain the relationship and motivation toward relational activities predicting relationship well-being for women

*MRA Aut. = Autonomous activity motivation; MRA Cont. = Controlled activity motivation; CMQ RAI = CMQ Relative Autonomy Index; rwb = relationship well-being; pair =Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships; com = Commitment; srq = State-Trait Relationship Questionnaire; vital = Vitality; a. = autonomous motivation subscale; c. = controlled motivation subscale; si = Sexual Intimacy; pi =Physical Intimacy; df =Disclosure of Feelings; dt =Disclosure of Thoughts; ss = Social Support; ip = Instrumental Support (Problems); is = Instrumental Support (Stress); n = Niceties; la =Support of Partner's Life Aspirations*

to be equal across gender and examined whether these restrictions significantly decreased model fit. Specifically, to ensure that the autonomous activity motivation factor, controlled activity motivation factor, and the relationship well-being factor represented the same constructs across gender (i.e., metric equivalence), we held the factor loadings constant across gender for the autonomous and controlled activity motivation scores and the relationship well-being indices. These restrictions did not result in a significant decrease in model fit, suggesting that the latent factors of the MRA and relationship well-being are metrically equivalent across gender.

We then tested for gender differences among the latent variables (i.e., the structural model) by holding constant the

variances of, and covariances between, latent variables. These restrictions also did not result in a significant decrease in model fit, suggesting that the relations among the latent variables are equivalent across gender.

However, when we tested for equivalence in error variances and covariances between men and women, there was a significant decrease in the model fit, suggesting that the data is more accurately depicted by separate models by gender. Thus, for the final models all parameters were set to be equal across gender, except for error variances and covariances, which were allowed to vary by gender.

The standardized estimates for the model are displayed in Fig. 1 (men) and Fig. 2 (women). First, examining the relation of autonomous to controlled activity motivation, results show that for both men and women, autonomous activity motivation and controlled activity motivation were modestly positively correlated ($r = .16$, $p < .05$ for men and women), suggesting that these two activity motivation factors are relatively independent of each other. Next, examining the relation of the CMQ to the MRA autonomous activity motivation, results show that for both men and women, CMQ relative autonomy and the MRA autonomous activity motivation were significantly correlated, ($r = .63$, $p < .001$ for men and women), such that greater autonomy toward maintaining a relationship was associated with greater autonomy in engaging in the activities of the relationship. Examining the relation of the CMQ to the MRA controlled activity motivation, results show that CMQ relative autonomy and MRA controlled activity motivation were modestly negatively correlated ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$ for men and women), such that greater autonomy toward maintaining a relationship was associated with less controlled motivation to engage in the activities of the relationship. In sum, these results indicate that relative autonomy as measured by the CMQ is positively related to but not completely overlapping with MRA autonomous activity motivation and appears to be only modestly related to MRA controlled activity motivation.

Finally, assessing the contribution of the CMQ and MRA scales in the prediction of relationship well-being, results show that the CMQ factor as well as both of the MRA activity motivation factors contribute uniquely to the prediction of relationship well-being. The more autonomous people were toward maintaining their relationship overall (CMQ), the greater their relationship well-being ($\beta = .45$, $p < .001$ among men and women). Also, the more people were willingly engaged in the activities of their relationship (MRA autonomous activity motivation), the greater their relationship well-being ($\beta = .46$, $p < .001$ among men and women). Finally, the more people felt pressured or coerced to engage in the activities of their relationship (MRA controlled activity motivation) the lower their relationship well-being ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .001$ among men and women). Notably, when both the CMQ and MRA simultaneously predicted relationship well-being, these two measures of relationship motivation powerfully predicted the relationship well-being general factor ($R^2 = .83$ for men, $R^2 = .81$ for women).

## Relations of the CMQ and MRA to attachment security and personality

Given that the CMQ and MRA seem to be measuring distinct constructs, we wanted to explore how these two measures might differ by examining their correlations to dimensions of personality and attachment. To provide a more direct comparison with the RAI of the CMQ, we calculated an overall autonomous activity motivation score by averaging across the MRA autonomous activity motivation scores ($M = 5.82$, SD = .75) and an overall controlled activity motivation score by averaging across the MRA controlled activity motivation scores ($M = 3.08$, SD = .92).

First, examining associations to attachment, we computed correlations between the motivation measures and dimensions of attachment anxiety (i.e., fear of rejection) and attachment avoidance (i.e., fear of closeness). Relative autonomy to maintain the relationship (CMQ) was negatively associated with attachment avoidance in both men ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$) and women ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$), but it was unrelated to attachment anxiety ($r = -.14$, *n.s.* for men; $r = -.11$, *n.s.* for women). Thus, the greater relative autonomy that people feel about maintaining their romantic relationship, the less they fear closeness in their relationship. When examining autonomous and controlled activity motivation separately, it appears that each relates to a different dimension of attachment. Specifically, attachment avoidance was negatively associated with autonomous activity motivation ($r = -.59$, $p < .001$ among men; $r = -.37$, $p < .001$ among women) but was unrelated to controlled activity motivation among women ($r = .05$, *n.s.*) and was only modestly positively correlated among men ($r = .20$, $p < .05$). In contrast, attachment anxiety was positively associated with controlled activity motivation ($r = .51$, $p < .001$ among men; $r = .39$, $p < .001$ among women) but was unrelated to autonomous activity motivation ($r = -.05$, *n.s.* among men; $r = -.06$, *n.s.* among women). Thus, the more people willingly engage their partners in a variety of relational activities, the less fearful they are of closeness in the relationship, while the more pressured and obligated they feel to engage in activities of the relationship, the more they fear rejection and abandonment by their partner.

Finally, we tested the associations of relative autonomy toward maintaining the relationship (CMQ) and motivations toward relational activities (MRA) to the Big Five personality traits (Table 5). In both men and women,

**Table 5** Correlations of CMQ relative autonomy and autonomous and controlled activity motivation with NEO-FFI personality domains

| | Neuroticism | Extraversion | Openness | Agreeableness | Conscientiousness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Men ($n = 112$) | | | | | |
| CMQ relative autonomy | −.03 | .10 | −.04 | .08 | −.04 |
| Mean autonomous activity motivation | .10 | .37** | .05 | .04 | .18 |
| Mean controlled activity motivation | .36** | −.01 | −.13 | −.39** | −.10 |
| Women ($n = 134$) | | | | | |
| CMQ relative autonomy | −.14 | .13 | .02 | .06 | .13 |
| Mean autonomous activity motivation | −.23** | .15 | .10 | .19* | .21* |
| Mean controlled activity motivation | .16 | −.05 | −.31** | −.17 | .03 |

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

relative autonomy toward maintaining the relationship (CMQ) was not significantly related to any of the personality dimensions. In contrast, both autonomous and controlled activity motivations showed associations to many of the Big Five dimensions. Among men, autonomous activity motivation was positively associated with Extraversion, while controlled activity motivation was positively correlated with Neuroticism and negatively correlated with Agreeableness. Thus, men who were more disagreeable and experience more negative affect were likely to feel more controlled in their relational activities, while those who were more outgoing and experience more positive affect were more likely to be willingly engaged in their relational activities. Among women, autonomous activity motivation was negatively correlated with Neuroticism and positively correlated with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, while controlled activity motivation was negatively associated with Openness. Thus, women who were more closed to experience and rigid were more likely to feel pressured to engage in their relational activities, while those who were friendlier, more conscientious, and less emotionally negative were likely to be more willingly engaged in their relational activities.

## Discussion

In this study, we sought to assess the potentially unique contributions of general motivations to maintain a relationship and motivations toward specific relational activities in the prediction of relationship well-being. We expected that motivations to maintain a relationship (CMQ) and motivations to engage in relational activities (MRA) would each independently carry significant implications for relational functioning (including commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within the relationship), and results clearly showed support for this model. Indeed, the CMQ and MRA both independently predicted relationship well-being and together they powerfully predicted relationship functioning, explaining roughly 80% of the variance in a general relationship well-being factor.

Notably, prior to this work, research on motivation toward engaging in a romantic relationship centered on a global estimate of reasons for maintaining the relationship but did not examine whether this motivation could be further differentiated by assessing motivation toward specific relational activities. Consistent with hierarchical models of motivation (see Vallerand 1997), we found that the prediction of functioning within romantic relationships is enhanced when relationship motivations are measured both globally and more proximally. Clearly, the results of this study suggest that including activity motivations in the assessment of relationship motivations provides additional information about the functioning and wellness of a romantic partnership. In particular, the more willingly people engage in various tasks of their relationship, the greater their commitment, satisfaction, intimacy, and vitality within the relationship. In contrast, the more pressured or coerced they feel about engaging in their relational activities, the more poorly their relationship functions.

Beyond showing a unique and significant contribution to relationship well-being, our results show further that relational activity motivation factors may provide stronger links to context-specific manifestations of important personality traits and relationship processes. Specifically, greater autonomous activity motivation (MRA) was associated with less attachment avoidance (i.e., fears of closeness) and greater controlled activity motivation was associated with greater attachment anxiety (i.e., fears of rejection and abandonment). Notably, the distinctions of autonomy and control in the MRA may help to understand the unique patterns found in relation to the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance. That is, as attachment avoidance reflects discomfort in being close to and depending on others, autonomous motivation—reflecting value for, interest in, and willingly engagement in the

activities with the partner—is expectedly negatively associated. Further, as attachment anxiety reflects worries that the self is unlovable and will be rejected, those higher on this dimension would likely view engagement in relational activities as more pressured and controlled—not something they "want to" or "enjoy" doing, but rather as something they "have to" or "must" do in order to preserve their sense of self.

With respect to personality, autonomous and controlled activity motivation were related to separate dimensions of the Big Five dimensions according to a gender-specific pattern. Specifically, women who were more closed to experience and rigid were more likely to feel pressured to engage in their relational activities, while those who were friendlier, more conscientious, and less emotionally negative were likely to be more willingly engaged in their relational activities. Men who were more disagreeable and experience more negative affect were likely to feel more controlled in their relational activities, while those who were more outgoing and experience more positive affect were more likely to be willingly engaged in their relational activities. While these analyses were exploratory, they suggest that distinguishing between the two motivational factors may be useful in understanding the contextual manifestations of personality within romantic relationships and the consequences of personality for behaviour regulation.

Notably, the CMQ, while an important predictor of relationship well-being, showed a negative association to attachment avoidance but was unrelated to attachment anxiety or to any of the Big Five personality dimensions. What this seems to suggest is that the CMQ may be identifying a global orientation toward approaching connection and being willingly committed to the relationship but may not be able to capture a more nuanced picture of relational engagement. The important distinction that the CMQ highlights is that why people are committed to their relationship matters. That is, it is not enough that partners simply stay in their relationship; they must be willingly committed to their relationship in order for the relationship to function well. Given that constructs in the relationships literature do not typically make this distinction (see La Guardia and Patrick 2008 for review), the CMQ continues to add vital information to our understanding of what makes relationships function optimally.

## Limitations and future directions

There are several limitations to the current study. First, the data are correlational and do not permit inferences about causality between variables. Future studies are required to model relationship motivations longitudinally in order to better assess their antecedents and consequences in the relationship. For example, future research could evaluate couples' motivations for specific activities using daily diaries and examine the immediate impact of motivations on daily relational behaviours as well as the cumulative impact on relationship well-being and functioning.

A second limitation is that we employed only self-report measures from one partner, rather than reports from both partners of the dyad. Research using the CMQ suggests that the relative autonomy of each partner to maintain their relationship influences their own relationship well-being as well as their partner's relationship well-being, such that the greater an individual's relative autonomy to maintain the relationship the greater their own and their partner's relationship well-being (Blais et al. 1990; Knee et al. 2005). Further, in friendship dyads, research has shown that autonomy supportive behaviour towards a partner promotes both one's own functioning and the partner's functioning within the relationship (Deci et al. 2006). Future research should evaluate the importance of mutuality of autonomy between partners in both motivations to maintain the relationship as well as to engage in specific relational activities, and use these estimates to predict self-reported relationship outcomes. Further, examining partners' reports of each other's behaviour will clarify the behavioural consequences of these self-reported motivational orientations (i.e., do what partners say about their own motivations get translated into their behaviour within the relationship?).

Another set of limitations involve the construction of the MRA. The first issue is that items assessing autonomous activity motivation (i.e., intrinsic motivation and identified regulation) and those assessing controlled activity motivation (i.e., introjected regulation and external regulation) are imbalanced in terms of their valence and in terms of how they embody approach versus avoidance motivation. These differences are partly due to the conceptual definitions of each regulatory style. In particular, intrinsic motivation is a positive form of behaviour regulation as it involves willing engagement in an activity and clearly represents approach motivation (i.e., the activity is pursued because of interest or pleasure inherent in the activity). Identified regulation is also a positive form of behaviour regulation as it involves willing engagement in an activity, but it can be characterized by both approach and avoidance motivation. For example, individuals who personally value intimacy in relationships could spend time with their partners either to increase the intimacy between them or to avoid having an increase in distance in their relationship. Notably, the identified regulation items of the MRA involve only approach motivation, which is a limitation of the scale. Finally, introjected regulation encompasses behaviours driven by perceived internal rewards or

pressures and external regulation encompasses behaviours driven by external rewards or pressures. That is, introjected and external regulations can involve both approach motives (i.e., pursuit of desired outcomes) and avoidance motives (i.e., prevention of undesired outcomes or escape from aversive events). An examination of the item content of the MRA reveals that while some positively valenced approach motivations are represented in introjected and external regulation items (e.g., life goals: "Because there are personal benefits to having a successful partner"), negatively valenced avoidance motivations are more frequently represented (e.g., self-disclosure: "Because my partner withdraws and becomes cold with me if I don't share my feelings with him/her").

The imbalances in item valence and approach and avoidance motivation could provide alternative explanations for our results. If it was the case that the autonomy and control dimensions simply reflect differences in valence or approach/avoidance motivation, then items in the introjected or external regulation dimensions that represent positively valenced approach motivations should load positively with intrinsic and identified items within the activity. They, however, do not. Thus, it would seem that associations between activity motivation and relationship well-being are not simply due to the valence of item content nor simply to being oriented toward approach or avoidance. Nonetheless, future revisions of the MRA should seek a greater balance between positively valenced and negatively valenced approach and avoidance motives within the identified, introjected and external regulatory styles.

A second issue is whether the MRA's factor structure will also hold for married couples. In the current sample, which is composed of mostly non-married individuals, people's activity motivations were explained by two factors of autonomous and controlled activity motivation. Although there may be mean level differences between married and dating couples in how autonomous and controlled they are in different relational activities, we expect that the factor structure demonstrated in this sample, and the relations of autonomy and control to relationship well-being, will be similar across dating and married couples. Notably, in this sample, relationship length did not moderate any of the study results. Thus, whether in a short-term or long-term relationship, being willingly engaged, in contrast to being compelled or coerced to engage, is expected to result in greater relationship well-being. Longevity is not the key factor, but rather, autonomy is.

The current construction of the MRA allows us to understand the relative role of autonomous and controlled motivations for relationship well-being. However, as it is currently constructed, it does not allow us to examine whether individuals vary in their motivations across their different relational activities and whether this variation in itself has important consequences for relational functioning. In the current version of the MRA we chose to use activity-specific wording for each activity to capture the distinct manifestations of each regulatory style (intrinsic, identified, introjected, external) within each activity. A consequence of this choice is that observed differences between activity scales could be due to differences in item content rather than differences in motivation per se.[4] Thus, if the aim is to assess variability across relational activities, the MRA activity subscales should be revised to create greater uniformity in items across each subscale while not losing the unique flavour of each relational activity. When items are more closely matched in content, error variance attributable to the item content is reduced. If we proffered some predictions regarding variability, we suspect that in undergraduate dating relationships, which are relatively satisfied relationships in which major problems have not yet arisen, individuals may show less variation in autonomy and control across different relational activities. In contrast, we suspect that in married couples, longer-term interdependence in their relationship may have provided more opportunities to experience both greater highs and lows within their partnership, and thus yield a more nuanced picture of partners' motivations toward different activities in the relationship. Further, distressed couples might show unique profiles in which motivation is deeply affected in certain sets of activities but not others.

Finally, one potential benefit of measuring motivations toward relational activities is that functioning and outcomes within specific activities might be predicted more fully. For example, knowing people's motivations toward sexual intimacy will probably bear greater relevance to their sexual behaviour and satisfaction with their sex life than would their motivations to maintain the relationship as a whole or to engage in some other relational activity. Future studies should evaluate whether the activity subscales of the MRA provide improved prediction of specific behaviour within those activities. Indeed, we expect that the activity subscales will improve the prediction of behaviours, cognitions, and emotions within each activity, allowing for the study of autonomy and control within highly specific relational contexts.

[4] That said, we observed considerable regularity across relational activity scales in terms of each scale's factor structure and covariance with the other activity scales. This regularity reflects the robustness of the constructs of autonomous and controlled activity motivation, and likely overshadows issues of item comparability.

## Conclusions

In summary, this study highlights the importance of measuring willingness to both maintain a relationship and engage in specific relational activities in order to optimally understand relational functioning. The more people willingly engage in their romantic relationships, and specifically in the numerous activities that comprise the partnership, the more positively their relationship functions. This initial exploration of motivation in particular relational activities shows that this level of inquiry has promise of providing a fuller understanding of how autonomy enhances, and feeling pressured or controlled detracts from, functioning and well-being within the various activities of a romantic partnership.

## Appendix: Motivations for relational activities

Sexual intimacy (14 items)

*Why do you engage in sexual activity (petting, oral sex, or intercourse) with your partner?*

*Intrinsic:*

1. Because I expect it to be interesting and exciting.
2. Because I get pleasure from sharing a special and intimate experience with my partner.
3. Because I find it very arousing and enjoyable to give my partner physical pleasure.

*Identified*:

1. Because I value sexual activity as a part of a full life.
2. Because sexual activity is an important part of my relationship.
3. Because it allows us to grow closer and more intimate.

*Introjected*:

1. Because sexual activity makes me feel better about myself.
2. Because that is what couples are supposed to do.
3. Because I'd feel anxious or guilty if I denied my partner of sexual activity.
4. Because my partner wants it, and it's my role to satisfy my partner's sexual needs.

*External*:

1. Because my partner gets moody and irritable if I deny him/her of sexual activity.
2. Because I fear my partner may become discontented with our relationship if I don't fulfill his/her sexual needs.
3. Because my partner is in a better mood and is nicer to me after we engage in sexual activity.
4. Because my partner will do things for me that he/she wouldn't do if I didn't engage in sexual activity with him/her.

Physical intimacy (14 items)

*Why do you engage in physical intimacy (i.e., hug, kiss, cuddle) with your partner?*

*Intrinsic*:

1. Because I enjoy being in contact with him/her.
2. Because I love the way I feel when I am in contact with him/her.
3. Because I am very attracted to my partner and desire to be in physical contact with him/her.

*Identified*:

1. Because it increases the intimacy and closeness in our relationship.
2. Because physical intimacy helps us stay connected and fosters emotional closeness between us.
3. Because I believe it is a healthy aspect of a good relationship.
4. Because it symbolizes our togetherness, which is something I value and strive for in our relationship.

*Introjected*:

1. Because romantic couples are supposed to show their affection for one another through physical intimacy.
2. Because I want others to know that we are a happy and intimate couple.
3. Because I feel anxious about our relationship unless there is a show of physical affection between us.
4. Because it pleases my partner, and I need to please him/her to feel important and wanted.

*External*:

1. Because my partner insists that we be physically affectionate.
2. Because my partner seems cold and rejecting if I don't give him/her physical affection.
3. Because my partner wants to be touched. So I do it to avoid a hassle from him/her.

Self-disclosure of feelings (13 items)

*Why do you share your feelings with your partner?*

*Intrinsic:*

1. Because I find it exciting to explore my innermost feelings with my partner.

2. Because it feels good to talk about my feelings with my partner.
3. Because I find it interesting to talk about my feelings with my partner.

*Identified*:

1. Because it is important to me that I can share my feelings with my partner.
2. Because I value being open about my feelings in my relationship.
3. Because being in-tune with each other's feelings helps our relationship stay on track.

*Introjected*:

1. Because when my partner shares his/her feelings, I feel obligated to share some of mine.
2. Because that's what my partner expects me to do.
3. Because people are supposed to share their feelings in relationships.

*External*:

1. Because my partner nags me until I tell him/her what I'm feeling.
2. Because my partner shows that he/she approves of me when I share my feelings.
3. Because my partner treats me better when I've expressed my feelings.
4. Because my partner withdraws and becomes cold with me if I don't share my feelings with him/her.

Self-disclosure of thoughts (13 items)

*Why do you share your thoughts and concerns with your partner?*

*Intrinsic:*

1. Because I get excited to tell my partner my thoughts.
2. Because it is interesting and thought-provoking to talk about my ideas with my partner.
3. Because I enjoy sharing deep and meaningful conversations with my partner.

*Identified:*

1. Because I value openness in our relationship.
2. Because I want my partner to know and understand me.
3. Because I value what I learn about myself when I discuss my thoughts with my partner.
4. Because talking to my partner gives me a new perspective on my problems and helps me deal with them.

*Introjected:*

1. Because I sometimes feel guilty if I keep my thoughts private.
2. Because I worry my partner will think I'm dumb or boring if I don't share my thoughts.
3. Because when my partner shares his/her thoughts, I feel like I have to share mine.

*External:*

1. Because my partner won't stop asking me questions unless I tell him/her what I'm thinking.
2. Because my partner is friendlier and nicer when I tell him/her what I'm thinking.
3. Because my partner demands that I be open about what I'm thinking, and he/she will get angry and resentful if I don't go along.

Social support (13 items)

*Why do you listen to your partner's problems?*

*Intrinsic*:

1. Because I am interested in whatever my partner is going through.
2. Because I enjoy the process of listening to and learning about my partner.
3. Because I am curious to know what my partner is feeling and thinking.

*Identified:*

1. Because I want my partner to be able to count on me when he/she is having problems.
2. Because I feel we become closer when I understand what my partner is going through.
3. Because it is important to me that my partner feels supported.

*Introjected*:

1. Because it is my responsibility to be there for my partner, and I'd feel bad if I wasn't there for him/her.
2. Because I'd feel guilty if I wasn't there for my partner when he/she is feeling down.
3. Because I need to do it to feel like I am a dependable partner.
4. Because I have to do it to be a good partner.

*External*:

1. Because my partner will get angry and resentful if I don't make time to listen to his/her problems and concerns.

2. Because if I just listen, my partner will stop bringing me down.
3. Because I expect that things will get worse between us if I don't make him/her feel better.

Instrumental support of partner's problems (12 items)

*Why do you try to help your partner solve his/her problems?*

*Intrinsic*:

1. Because I find it exciting and challenging to help my partner solve his/her problems.
2. Because I enjoy the challenge of helping my partner work through his/her tough issues.
3. Because I can't help but get caught-up in the thrill of tackling my partner's problems.

*Identified*:

1. Because I believe my partner's challenges are mine too.
2. Because it is important for us to tackle problems together.
3. Because I find it very satisfying to help my partner overcome a difficultly.

*Introjected*:

1. Because I'd feel like a bad person if I didn't try to help my partner solve his/her problems.
2. Because I worry that I will look like a neglectful partner if I don't help my partner solve his/her problems.
3. Because I feel valuable when I help my partner work through his/her issues.

*External*:

1. Because my partner can't cope with his/her problems without me.
2. Because if I help my partner get over his/her problems, we can get back to having fun and enjoying ourselves.
3. Because I have to help my partner for him/her to help me with my problems.

Instrumental support to make partner's life less stressful (12 items)

*Why do you invest time and effort in trying to do things that make your partner's life easier or less stressful?*

*Intrinsic*:

1. Because I get a lot of pleasure out of making things easier for my partner.
2. Because it excites me to make my partner feel good.
3. Because I enjoy taking care of my partner.

*Identified*:

1. Because I value a giving relationship.
2. Because I believe we need to work together and be unselfish for our relationship to stay strong.
3. Because I want to see my partner prosper and be content. So, I'll do whatever I can to assist him/her in that.

*Introjected*:

1. Because I feel that helping my partner out is a way to fulfill my role in my relationship.
2. Because taking care of your partner is what it means to be in a romantic relationship.
3. Because I get anxious if I don't feel like I'm useful in my partner's life.

*External*:

1. Because I fear my partner will become unhappy with our relationship if I don't do things for him/her.
2. Because then we avoid arguing about who should do what.
3. Because my partner is easier to live with if he/she gets what he/she wants.

Niceties (14 items)

*Why do you do special things for your partner (e.g., give gifts, call him/her, take him/her out)?*

*Intrinsic:*

1. Because I get really excited at the anticipation of knowing my partner will enjoy what I've done or plan to do.
2. Because I enjoy the process of planning something that will bring my partner pleasure.
3. Because it delights me to see my partner happy.

*Identified*:

1. Because I want to show my partner how much I love and cherish him/her.
2. Because I want to express my gratitude for everything my partner does for me.
3. Because my partner deserves to be cared for and attended to.

*Introjected*:

1. Because I know it is the nice thing to do.
2. Because being in a romantic relationship means you've got to do things like that for your partner.

3. Because doing such things makes me feel like a good person and a good partner.
4. Because my partner sometimes expects that I do special things for him/her, and I'd feel guilty or anxious if I didn't follow through.

*External*:

1. Because I expect my partner will reciprocate and do special things for me.
2. Because it is a way to keep my partner interested and contented in our relationship.
3. Because things like that put my partner in a good mood and he/she treats me better.
4. Because my partner seems distant and unpleasant if I don't do special things for him/her.

Support for partner's life goals (13 items)

*Why do you do things to support your partner's life aspirations and goals (e.g., education, career, hobbies, family, lifestyle)?*

*Intrinsic:*

1. Because I find it exciting to talk with my partner about his/her dreams and to help make them a reality.
2. Because I enjoy the process of helping my partner stay motivated and overcoming obstacles to his/her goals.
3. Because helping my partner successfully pursue his/her goals is a very challenging and interesting task.

*Identified:*

1. Because I value the opportunity to contribute to something that is very meaningful in my partner's life.
2. Because my partner's goals are very important to me, and I want to be a part of achieving those goals.
3. Because I want to see my partner reach his/her potential or what he/she wants to be.

*Introjected:*

1. Because my partner might fail without my support, and I would feel guilty if I let that happen.
2. Because my partner's achievements will reflect good things about me.
3. Because my partner's achievements will make me look good to others as well.
4. Because helping my partner pursue his/her goals makes me feel useful.

*External:*

1. Because my partner will be easier to live with when he/she achieves his/her goals.
2. Because there are personal benefits to having a successful partner.
3. Because supporting him/her is an investment in my future too, since a successful partner makes life easier.

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