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The way I make you feel: How relatedness and compassionate goals promote partner's relationship satisfaction

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Research has investigated the role of three basic psychological needs as proposed by Self-Determination Theory – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – in explaining relationship satisfaction. Research has also explored how relatedness specifically increases prosocial motivations in the individual but has not focused on the role of relatedness in shaping partners' relationship functioning over time. This research takes a dyadic perspective that proposes that relatedness fulfillment fosters compassionate goals, which in turn predict increases in partner's satisfaction. Forty-five heterosexual dating couples were asked about their relatedness need fulfillment, compassionate goals, and relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was assessed again four weeks later. Results showed that one's own relatedness fulfillment, but not one's partner's relatedness fulfillment at Time 1 uniquely predicts partner's increased satisfaction at Time 2, and that this is mediated by one's own higher compassionate goals. These findings highlight the dyadic importance of having one's needs met in promoting relationship functioning over time.

Keywords: self-determination; interpersonal relationships; interpersonal goals; relatedness; relationship satisfaction

Recently, research has begun to examine how self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) can be used to explain romantic relationship functioning (e.g. La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). In short, SDT proposes that people have three basic psychological needs and that relationships are satisfying to the extent to which these needs are met (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). However, with few exceptions, research on self-determination in relationships has focused on how one's own need fulfillment and motivation can lower one's own defensiveness and ego-involvement (e.g. Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005; Patrick et al., 2007), while overlooking the idea of need fulfillment as an explanation for relationship growth processes. This research takes a dyadic perspective that integrates need fulfillment with emerging research on compassionate goals (CG) (Crocker & Canevello, 2008) in order to predict increased relationship satisfaction. Specifically, this research focuses on how one's relatedness is associated with one's partner's increased relationship satisfaction over time, due to CG toward one's partner.

Relatedness need fulfillment and relationship satisfaction

SDT is, at its core, a theory of optimal human development and functioning. SDT takes an organismic position, positing that people have a natural tendency toward growth and integration (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This growth and integration, in turn, is facilitated or thwarted by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Recently, researchers have posited that SDT – need fulfillment, specifically – explains the processes underlying health and development of close relationships. In essence, relationships are fulfilling to the degree that they support one's needs (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). For instance, people who are in relationships that fulfill these basic needs are more willing to authentically express their emotions (La Guardia, 2007) and more readily turn to their partner for support (Ryan, La Guardia, Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005).

Relatedness in particular seems to play a unique role in facilitating positive relationship functioning. Relatedness in SDT is defined as a feeling of connection, inclusion, and intimacy with others. This concept is echoed across several other frameworks of close relationships such as Baumeister and Leary's (1995) need to belong, and Reis and Patrick's (1996) discussion of intimacy. However, it is important to note that relatedness is distinct from other, more general concepts of affect and self-view in relation to others. For instance, relatedness is not simply positive or negative affect, vitality, or from a sociometer perspective, self-esteem (Patrick et al., 2007). Relatedness has been found to be the most

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important need in predicting security across attachment to different caregivers (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). Patrick et al. (2007) found across three studies that when one feels that his or her needs are being met, he or she experiences higher satisfaction, commitment, and employs more adaptive responses to conflict. Moreover, relatedness fulfillment was the most important predictor of these relationship outcomes.

Relatedness has also been established as empirically and conceptually distinct from relationship satisfaction. SDT itself asserts that feelings of closeness are not synonymous with satisfaction. Relatedness only captures one of three dimensions regarding what makes a relationship satisfying (Patrick et al., 2007). Indeed, while Patrick et al. (2007) found that relatedness was the most important predictor of satisfaction, the other basic psychological needs (i.e. competence and autonomy) also uniquely contributed to satisfaction. This indicates that while relatedness is a strong predictor of satisfaction, they are not the same construct. Other researchers have posited that a wide variety of other dimensions, such as sexual satisfaction and security (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992), contribute to satisfaction as well.

However, despite research showing that relatedness is useful in explaining what makes relationships satisfying, and as a phenomenon that predicts less defensiveness in relationships, there is no research, to our knowledge, that examines what role relatedness might play in explaining positive growth in relationships. That is, although some studies have established the role of relatedness in explaining current levels of satisfaction (e.g. Patrick et al., 2007), it has not been determined whether relatedness fulfillment is useful in explaining increases in one's own and one's partner's relationship satisfaction over time.

Direct path: relatedness and positive change in partner satisfaction

Recent research suggests that relatedness fulfillment may be predictive of partner's increased satisfaction over time. For instance, people who experience higher relatedness/fulfillment expect future interactions to better fulfill their relatedness needs (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007). Individuals who report experiencing more relatedness also report valuing those feelings more and enjoying the experiences more deeply (Moller, Deci, & Elliot, 2010). These findings suggest that increased expectations for and value placed on relatedness may act as motivation to seek further relatedness/fulfilling experiences. Thus, it stands to reason that when one's relationship partner fulfills one's own need for relatedness, one may want to support the partner in return, which should in turn be associated with partners' increased relationship satisfaction over time.

Additionally, relatedness has been found to promote different forms of prosocial intentions and behavior (e.g. Pavey, Greitmeyer, & Sparks, 2011). As prosocial behavior has been defined as 'the broad range of actions intended to benefit one or more people other than oneself – behaviors such as helping, comforting, sharing, and cooperation' (Batson, 1998, p. 282), this association with higher prosocial behavior might apply to romantic relationship partners as well. For instance, outside the context of relationships, overall self-reports of relatedness have been associated with prosocial behaviors such as donating to charity. Further, among those currently working in a shelter, those with overall higher relatedness spent more time working at the shelter (Gagné, 2003).

Pavey et al. (2011) have also found that experimentally manipulating feelings of relatedness, specifically, increases both intentions to engage in and actual prosocial behavior, such as voicing intentions to volunteer and donating to charities. Further, increased prosocial intentions were further mediated by increased feelings of connectedness with support targets (Pavey et al., 2011, Study 2). Although this research does not directly address whether prosocial behavior increased because of truly selfless motivations, this finding indirectly suggests that the reason is due to other-focused motivations. When taken together, this literature suggests that relatedness may play a role in promoting other-focused intentions through continued pursuit of relatedness-fulfillment. As such, we expected that increased feelings of relatedness within romantic relationships would be associated with intentions to support partners. Furthermore, goals to support partners would predict positive change in one's partner's satisfaction over time.

Indirect path: the role of CG

Recent work on interpersonal goals supports the proposed benefits of relatedness-fulfillment over time. CG have previously been defined as intentions to support others' for their own sake, without concern for benefits for the self (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). We believe that CG can be conceptualized to fall under the umbrella of a motivation to engage in prosocial behavior. That is, people with high CG in a given relationship desire to be helpful and constructive to their partner and want to avoid engaging in behavior that will be hurtful (Canevello & Crocker, 2011). Importantly for the predictions of this paper, CG are theoretically and empirically distinct from simply being responsive to one's partner. That is, CG reflect a guiding intention to be caring toward partners and finding ways to help, while responsiveness is more reflective of properly reacting to others (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). We feel that this distinction is necessary, as we are interested in how partner-focused prosocial intentions mediate the link

between relatedness fulfillment and increases in partner satisfaction.

Research on interpersonal goals has begun to establish a link between CG and relationship functioning. For instance, research examining roommate pairs has shown that CG promote relationship growth, as they are beneficial for one's own and one's partner's perceptions of responsiveness (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Further, there is an 'upward spiral' of responsiveness, such that CG predict increased responsiveness to one's partner, which predicts increased partner responsiveness in return (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Interestingly, the link between CG and need fulfillment has also been explored, suggesting an association between goals and needs over time (Canevello & Crocker, 2011).

We propose that when one's relatedness need is fulfilled to a greater extent, one will also have higher levels of CG for one's partner. Given the assertion of Pavey and her colleagues (2011) that relatedness leads to increased motivation to care for others and engage in prosocial behavior, we believed that relatedness would also be associated with CG – a motivation to support one's partner, specifically. Furthermore, it is this increased focus on being a constructive force for one's partner that would, in turn, predict increases in one's partner's satisfaction over time.

The present research

This research seeks to expand on previous literature by testing the role of relatedness fulfillment as a possible relationship-promoting phenomenon such that *one's own* relatedness has implications for *one's partner's* increased satisfaction over time. Because of the previously found association between relatedness fulfillment and higher prosocial orientations, we predicted that one's relatedness fulfillment would be a unique predictor of partner's increased satisfaction over time beyond the partner's relatedness fulfillment. Again, we hypothesized that this increase is primarily because those higher in relatedness would have higher CG toward partners. As such, own CG at Time 1 should mediate the relationship between own relatedness fulfillment at Time 1 and partners'

increased relationship satisfaction at Time 2 (see Figure 1).

Method

Participants

Participants were 45 heterosexual exclusive dating couples (90 individuals) from undergraduate psychology classes at a medium-sized mid-Atlantic university, 40 of which at least one partner returned for Time 2 (71 individuals). To be eligible, participants needed to be in a self-defined committed relationship and have a romantic partner who was willing to participate. All couples were compensated by being entered into a raffle for several $25 gift cards to area businesses. Participants from psychology classes were also compensated with extra credit. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 25. The average duration of relationship was 55.18 weeks (SD = 62.347). The sample was fairly homogeneous in racial make-up, with 78.9% being White/Non-Hispanic.

Procedure and measures

Participants arrived at the laboratory with their current romantic partner for the first session. Couple members were seated on opposite sides of the room, to prevent contamination or communication of their responses. The couples completed the Time 1 questionnaire, which included measures of relationship satisfaction, CG, and need fulfillment. To measure changes in relationship satisfaction over time, participants returned to the laboratory four weeks later at Time 2 to report relationship satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction was measured with the Quality of Relationships Index (QRI; Knee, 1998) at both Time 1 ($\alpha = 0.92$) and Time 2 ($\alpha = 0.97$). This scale measures how satisfied participants are in their romantic relationships. Participants rated 6 items about how much they liked their relationship (e.g. '*My relationship with my partner makes me happy*') on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.'

Relatedness need fulfillment

Relatedness was measured at Time 1 using the Basic Psychological Need Scale (La Guardia et al., 2000). This 3-item scale measures the degree to which romantic partners fulfill the basic psychological need for relatedness. A sample item reads '*When I am with my romantic partner, I often feel a lot of distance in our relationship*' (reverse coded); $\alpha = 0.62$), Participants rated each statement on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree.'
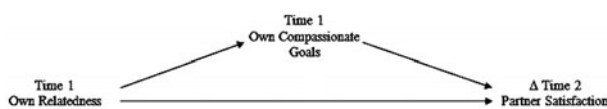

Figure 1. Conceptual depiction process by which one's own compassionate goals mediate the association between one's own relatedness and change in one's partner's relationship satisfaction.

Compassionate goals

CG were measured at Time 1 using a version of scale developed by Crocker and Canevello ([2008](#)) that was adapted specifically for romantic relationships. Based on the stem, '*In my romantic relationship, I try to* ', participants indicated their agreement with twelve items (e.g. '*Avoid being selfish or self-centered,*' '*do things that are helpful for both me and my partner.*') ($\alpha = 0.83$) using a Likert-type scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly).

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between all variables are provided in Table [1](#), with within-couple correlations along the diagonal. The significant within-couple correlations for relatedness, CG, and satisfaction at Time 1 indicate nonindependence within dyads. As such, we computed the overall correlations and significance tests using the procedure discussed in Gonzalez and Griffin ([1995](#)) to control for nonindependence between partners. At the bivariate level, relatedness was positively associated with CG and satisfaction at Time 1 and Time 2. CG positively predicted satisfaction at Time 1 and Time 2. Further, Time 1 satisfaction was significantly associated with satisfaction at Time 2. Given the somewhat low correlations between dyad members, we conducted several exploratory analyses regarding discrepancy between partner's predictors.

Analytic strategy

One result of dyadic nonindependence is that characteristics and behaviors of one partner likely affect the outcomes of the other partner. Relatedness, CG, and relationship satisfaction were considered mixed variables because they vary at both the between- and within-dyad levels. The actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, [1996](#); Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, [2006](#)) was used to model the interdependence of dyadic data and to test whether each participant's variables predict their partner's outcomes, independent of the effect of partner's variables. In these analyses, an actor variable refers to any variable supplied by oneself (e.g. actor relatedness). A partner variable refers to any variable supplied by one's partner (i.e. partners' relatedness). Analyses were conducted with SAS Proc Mixed (Littell, Milliken, Stroup, & Wolfinger, [1996](#); Singer, [1998](#)). All variables were standardized around the grand mean.

Testing distinguishability

Although the couples in our study were heterosexual and can in some cases be considered distinguishable, researchers suggest testing for distinguishability rather than assuming that men and women are truly distinguishable (Ackerman, Donnellan, & Kashy, [2011](#); Kashy & Donnellan, [2012](#); Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, [2006](#)). As such, each of the models reported in the analyses below were tested for distinguishability by gender. To do this, we ran an omnibus test of distinguishability (Kashy & Donnellan, [2012](#)) at each step of the mediation described below. For each step, two separate models were run: distinguishable and indistinguishable by gender. We took the -2 log likelihood from each model and computed a chi-square difference test. In each model below, the chi-square difference test was nonsignificant (p's > 0.58), so we concluded that there is no empirical evidence that the pathways are different depending upon gender. As a result of the nonsignificance, we present models that treat dyads as indistinguishable and gender was not included in any of the reported analyses. As such, covariance parameters

Table 1.   Means, Standard Deviations, and correlations among relatedness, need fulfillment, compassionate goals, and Time 1 and Time 2 satisfaction.

		Descriptive statistics		Correlations			
	Characteristics	M	SD	1	2	3a	3b
1.	Relatedness	6.01	0.87	**0.27**[†]			
2.	Compassionate goals	3.97	0.59	0.46[***]	**0.38**[*]		
3.	Satisfaction						
	3a. Time 1	5.80	1.07	0.68[***]	0.43[***]	**0.40**[**]	
	3b. Time 2	5.33	1.67	0.25[*]	0.28[*]	0.46[***]	**0.23**
4.	Age	19.31	1.36	0.105	0.142	0.160	0.100
5.	Relationship duration	55.19	62.34	0.120	−0.031	0.176	.135

Note: Values along the bold diagonal represent within-couple correlations. Correlations and significance levels were determined using procedures for indistinguishable dyads discussed by Gonzalez and Griffin ([1995](#)). Additionally, relatedness was measured on a 7-point scale and compassionate goals were measured on a 5-point scale.
[†]$p \leq 0.10.$ [*]$p \leq 0.05.$ [**]$p < 0.01.$ [***]$p < 0.001.$

were estimated using a REPEATED statement with the specification TYPE = CSR, which treats variance and a common covariance between each component of the R matrix to be equal across gender.

Mediation analyses over time

To test the proposed mediation model over time, actor relationship satisfaction at Time 1 was included as a covariate and partner relationship satisfaction at Time 2 was the criterion so that the criterion represented residual change in partner relationship satisfaction from Time 1 to Time 2. Three models were specified to correspond with tests of whether actor CG mediated the association between actor relatedness and changes in partner relationship satisfaction. Finally, to test the significance of this mediation, we computed a 95% asymmetric confidence interval around the indirect effect of *ab* using the bootstrapping procedure in MPlus. We chose to use bootstrapping as this procedure provides the most accurate estimates and confidence intervals relative to other tests of mediation, such as the Sobel Test (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004).

Model 1 specified partner relationship satisfaction at Time 2 as the criterion and included partner Time 1 relationship satisfaction and actor and partner Time 1 relatedness as predictors:

$$T2 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} = \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} \, T1 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} \\ + \beta_{12} \text{Partner}R + \beta_{13} \text{ Actor}R + e_1$$

As shown in Table 2 (Step 1), Time 1 partner relationship satisfaction predicted greater Time 2 partner relationship satisfaction ($p < 0.01$). Actor relatedness pre-

dicted increased partner satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). Partner relatedness, however, was not a significant predictor ($p = 0.34$).

Model 2 specified actor CG as the criterion with actor and partner relatedness as predictors:

$$T1 \text{ Actor Compassionate Goals} = \beta_{20} + \beta_{21} \text{ Partner}R \\ + \beta_{22} \text{ Actor}R + e_2$$

As shown in Table 2 (Step 2), both actor relatedness ($p < .001$) and partner relatedness ($p < .01$) significantly predicted greater actor CG.

Finally, Model 3 included the same terms as Model 1, but with the addition of actor and partner CG:

$$T2 \text{ partner satisfaction} = \beta_{30} + \beta_{31} \, T1 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} \\ + \beta_{32} \text{ Partner}R + \beta_{33} \text{ Actor}R \\ + \beta_{34} \text{ Partner}CG + \beta_{35} \text{ Actor}CG + e_3$$

Consistent with the proposed mediation model, actor CG were a significant predictor of increased partner satisfaction ($p = 0.01$) but actor relatedness was not (Table 2, steps 3 & 4). To test the significance of this mediation, we computed a 95% confidence interval around the indirect effect by entering the full Model 3 into MPlus, and using the bootstrapping procedure (MacKinnon et al., 2004). The results of this procedure revealed a significant indirect effect (ab = 0.18, CI = 0.07; 0.28).

These findings support the proposed model in which actor relatedness predicts higher actor CG which, in turn, predict increased partner relationship satisfaction over time. That is, people who felt relatively more related were also higher in CG compared with other people in the sample. Having relatively higher CG also predicted more positive change in partner's satisfaction over the course of a month. These findings also rule out the reverse model that actor CG predict actor relatedness, which in turn predicts increased partner satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, the association between actor relatedness fulfillment and increases in partner relationship satisfaction was reduced to nonsignificant when actor CG are included in the model (B = 0.23 in Step 1 and 0.09 in Steps 3 & 4).

Table 2. APIM analyses testing the unique prediction of actor and partner relatedness and compassionate goals to change in partner relationship satisfaction.

Characteristics	B	SE B	pr	p
Step 1: Actor and partner relatedness predicting change in partner satisfaction (Time 2)				
Partner relationship satisfaction	0.51	0.15	0.55	**
Partner relatedness	−0.14	0.14	0.18	ns
Actor relatedness	0.23	0.11	0.37	*
Step 2: Actor and partner relatedness predicting actor compassionate goals				
Partner relatedness	0.25	0.10	0.25	**
Actor relatedness	0.40	0.09	0.31	***
Steps 3 and 4: Mediation				
Partner relationship satisfaction	0.46	0.14	0.54	**
Partner relatedness	−0.23	0.14	0.31	ns
Actor relatedness	0.09	0.11	0.15	ns
Partner compassionate goals	0.08	0.12	0.13	ns
Actor compassionate goals	0.38	0.12	0.52	**

Notes: $^*p \leq 0.05$. $^{**}p < 0.01$. $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Partner discrepancy

In order to examine whether discrepancies between partner's relatedness or CG predicted changes in partner satisfaction, we used a method recommended by Kenny (1988), tests whether discrepancy predicts increases in partner satisfaction, after correcting for the main effects of both actor and partner predictors. Controlling for the main effects emphasizes that it is the discrepancy between partners that is driving the effect rather than a function of either component. Thus, a discrepancy score was created by taking the absolute value of the differ-

ence between actor and partner scores. This absolute value difference score was entered into the regression equation along with each component. Additionally, the discrepancy scores are considered a level 2 variable, as both members of any given dyad have the same score.

We then tested versions of Models 1 and 3 above, modified to include discrepancy scores for relatedness (Models 1 & 3) and CG (Model 3). That is, for Model 1, we specified partner relationship satisfaction at Time 2 as the criterion and included partner Time 1 relationship satisfaction and actor and partner Time 1 relatedness as predictors:

$$
\begin{aligned}
T2 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} = {} & \beta_{10} + \beta_{11} \, T1 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} \\
& + \beta_{12} \, \text{Partner}R + \beta_{13} \, \text{Actor}R \\
& + \beta_{14} \, \text{Disc}R + e_1
\end{aligned}
$$

In Model 3, we specified partner relationship satisfaction at Time 2 as the criterion and included partner Time 1 relationship satisfaction, actor and partner Time 1 relatedness and CG, as well as discrepancy scores for both relatedness and CG as predictors:

$$
\begin{aligned}
T2 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} = {} & \beta_{30} + \beta_{31} T1 \text{ Partner Satisfaction} \\
& + \beta_{32} \, \text{Partner}R + \beta_{33} \, \text{Actor}R \\
& + \beta_{34} \, \text{Partner}CG + \beta_{35} \, \text{Actor}CG \\
& + \beta_{36} \, \text{Disc}R + \beta_{37} \, \text{Disc}CG + e_3
\end{aligned}
$$

Discrepancy scores in both Models 1 and 3 failed to reach significance (p's ≥ 0.20), indicating that differences between partner's scores on either relatedness or CG are not predictive of increases in partner's satisfaction over time. Furthermore, the discrepancy scores did not significantly change the mediation model above. That is, in Model 1, actor relatedness continued to predict increases in partner satisfaction ($\beta = 0.386$, $p = 0.002$). In Model 3, actor CG predicted increases in partner satisfaction ($\beta = 0.381$, $p = 0.004$), but relatedness failed to reach significance ($\beta = 0.140$, $p = 0.256$).

Discussion

The results offer support for our prediction that actor's relatedness is associated with partners' relationship satisfaction across 4 weeks, independent of partner's relatedness needs. Thus, not only does the fulfillment of relatedness needs have consequences for one's own relationship outcomes (La Guardia, 2007; Patrick et al., 2007), relatedness also has important consequences for understanding partner's perceptions of the relationship. The results add a unique and as yet untested perspective to our current understanding of SDT. Although previous research has examined need fulfillment in the context of close relationships (e.g. Patrick et al., 2007, Study 2; Knee et al., 2005, Studies 3 & 4), much of that work

has focused on outlining intrapsychic processes and consequences related to need fulfillment in individuals. This research is also one of the first studies to examine changes in relationships over time as it relates to SDT and need fulfillment. To our knowledge, this study provides some of the first evidence that need fulfillment has implications for romantic partners' perceptions of relationship by expanding upon the research conducted by Patrick and colleagues (2007).

Our results also suggest that CG mediate this association, such that the fulfillment of relatedness needs are related to greater goals to support relationships partners, which lead to partner's increased relationship satisfaction. Need fulfillment theory has largely focused on how need fulfillment influences the sense of self and assumes that relatedness is beneficial because it decreases self-focus (Patrick et al., 2007). These data offer an alternative interpretation, suggesting that fulfillment of relatedness needs can elicit desires to support partner's needs (rather than simply decrease focus on one's self), which then promote partners' relationship satisfaction. This is also, to our knowledge, the first study to examine the process by which relatedness is associated with changes in relationship satisfaction. Previous studies addressing need fulfillment theory have examined associations at one time point or via daily diary studies but have not examined growth models of relationships. These data provide new evidence that suggest relatedness fulfillment explains dynamic relationship processes – specifically, increases in relationship satisfaction.

Limitations and future directions

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, we were unable to address causality: in other words, does partner's relatedness need fulfillment *cause* actors' increased relationship satisfaction? Only experimental research can definitively establish whether causal associations exist. However, because of the temporal nature of these analyses (partner's Time 1 relatedness predicted actor's increased relationships satisfaction from Times 1 to 2), this study does support the plausibility that partner's relatedness fulfillment cause actor's increased relationship satisfaction. Additionally, some other work on need fulfillment and interpersonal goals has also found support for a mediational model wherein self-image goals mediate the association between need fulfillment and self-presentation (Hadden, Overup, & Knee, in press). Although the focus of Hadden et al. (in press) research was on self-image goals, the paper does support a mediation model from need fulfillment to self-presentation through goals, and found a positive association between need fulfillment (each of the subscales) and CG.

Future research should explore the causal nature of these associations. Additionally, these data do not

directly address the possibility of cyclical interpersonal dynamics. In Phase 1 analyses, actors' relatedness and relationship satisfaction were positively associated at Time 1. Thus, it is likely that actors' increased relationship satisfaction may lead to their simultaneously higher relatedness, which may, in turn, promote partners' later relationship satisfaction. Again, future research should address this possibility.

Also, these data cannot speak to the generalizability of associations between partner's relatedness need-fulfillment and actor's subsequent relationship satisfaction across contexts, including other types of close relationships, demographics, or time frames. The sample in this study was young (aged 18–25), dating, relatively educated (at least one member of each couple was enrolled in university courses), and they were followed over a relatively short period of time. Although we see no reason why the associations described here should not hold across different contexts (i.e. other relationship types, or in older, or relatively less educated samples, or over shorter or longer time-periods) these associations should be tested across a variety of circumstances.

There are also several possible avenues for future work, as well. Namely, while this research focused exclusively on relationship satisfaction, it would be worthwhile for future work to expand our findings to test whether relatedness and CG work in similar ways with other relationship outcomes such as commitment and closeness. Additionally, because previous experimental research has suggested that relatedness plays a unique role in increasing prosocial motivations, we only examined the relatedness need. However, it is possible that the other two needs posited by SDT may be of importance to other aspects of relationship functioning. For example, it may be the case that people who feel a greater sense of autonomy in their relationships may approach relationship conflict differently as past research suggests that trait autonomy is associated with decreased defensiveness and more understanding responses to conflict (Knee et al., 2005). Future research should attempt to determine more conclusively whether relatedness, specifically, plays a unique role, or, as SDT posits, all three basic psychology needs play a role.

Conclusion

The present research examined the role of relatedness in explaining relationship growth. Specifically, we found that feelings of relatedness fulfillment in an individual are associated with higher CG toward one's partner. These CG, in turn, predict positive change in one's partner's satisfaction over the course of a month. This research is unique in that, with few exceptions, researchers of self-determination in relationships have focused mostly on static intrapersonal processes, and have not considered the importance of need fulfillment as an explanation for positive relationship growth processes. As such, this research is one of the first studies to take both a dyadic and dynamic perspective on need fulfillment in relationships. As such, it lays a foundation for researchers interested in exploring how feeling one's own needs are met can promote positive relationship experiences not simply for oneself, but for one's partner as well.

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