

Shifting priorities: Effects of partners' goal conflict on goal adjustment processes and relationship quality in developing romantic relationships

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Abstract

We investigated whether partners in newly developing romantic relationships adjust their goals when they experience conflict with the goals of their partner, and the consequences of goal conflict and goal adjustment. Fifty-nine newly dating couples ($N = 118$) reported on their goals at an initial session and again 3 months later. Multilevel models indicated that when people reported higher conflict between a goal and their partner's goals, they were more likely to stop pursuing as well as to devalue the importance of that particular goal over time. Furthermore, goal devaluing was associated with increases in relationship commitment over time but decreases in women's relationship satisfaction when their partners devalued conflicting goals. Overall levels of goal conflict were associated with marginal decreases in relationship satisfaction. These results indicate that romantic partners try to adjust their goals to reduce goal conflict even in developing relationships, and that these adjustments have consequences for relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Keywords

Goals, goal adjustment, goal conflict, goal pursuit, relationship commitment, relationship development, relationship satisfaction, romantic relationships

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Jane has been trying hard to cut back on her spending to save money for a car. She has been able to save a significant amount of money by going out less frequently to eat and drink with her friends. Recently, she met and started dating Peter. As Jane and Peter spend time together and get to know each other, it becomes clear that Jane's goal to cut back on her spending is often in conflict with Peter's goal to try new restaurants and bars in the area—something he would really like to do together with Jane. Jane is unsure about what to do in this situation, as her goal to save money is in conflict with Peter's goal to enjoy the local dining scene. She clearly values and wishes she could do both and is unsure how to reduce this goal conflict in her developing relationship with Peter.

As this example illustrates, we try to pursue many goals in our personal lives—such as saving money, traveling, or building a successful career—and the pursuit of these goals often occurs in the context of romantic relationships and can therefore be heavily influenced by our relationship partners (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Fitzsimons, Finkel, & vanDellen, 2015). When a given goal conflicts with the romantic partner's goals, maintaining the pursuit of the goal may at times be difficult and may put strain on the relationship (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). Thus, when people realize that a goal they pursue conflicts with their romantic partner's goals, they may try to resolve or minimize the conflict. In the current study, we examined two goal adjustment processes that people may use in the context of developing relationships to reduce goal conflict: stopping the pursuit of specific goals altogether and devaluing specific goals that conflict with a romantic partner's goals. We also examined whether the devaluing of conflicting goals and overall levels of goal conflict have any consequences for both one's own and the partner's satisfaction with and commitment to the relationship.

Goal pursuit in romantic relationships

People invest a lot of time and energy into their goal pursuits, which give structure and purpose to their everyday activities (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that the extent to which people are able to make sufficient progress toward their goals is critical for well-being (Emmons, 1986, 1999; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). More specifically, when people are able to make goal progress, they experience higher positive emotions, lower negative emotions, and higher overall life satisfaction (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986, 1999; King, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In contrast, when people are unable to make progress toward their goals, they experience higher negative emotions, lower positive emotions, and lower overall life satisfaction (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986, 1999; King, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Although goal progress is important, people are not always able to freely do what they want to do, and their pursuits are influenced by many factors. One particularly important influence on goal pursuit—but one that has been considerably overlooked until recent years—concerns people's romantic relationship partners (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Fitzsimons et al., 2015; Orehek & Forest, 2016). Romantic partners' lives are often closely intertwined, reflecting a high level of interdependence (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008). The actions of one partner affect the actions and outcomes of the other

partner and vice versa, resulting in a need for partners to coordinate the activities associated with their goal pursuits (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008). Thus, romantic partners influence many aspects of goal pursuit, including what goals to pursue, and when and how to pursue them (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010).

Given the mutual influence of romantic partners on each other, successful coordination between partners' goal pursuits is vital but can often be challenging (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008). No two individuals have the same set of goals, thus, some degree of conflict between partners' goals is inevitable (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008). However, couples differ in the degree of conflict between the partners' goals, which has implications for the ease with which partners can successfully coordinate their goal pursuits (Gere & Schimmack, 2013; Gere, Schimmack, Pinkus, & Lockwood, 2011). Partners with higher levels of goal conflict have a harder time coordinating their goals, making it more difficult for partners to make goal progress (Gere & Schimmack, 2013).

Mounting research evidence points to the importance of congruence between romantic partners' goals for the quality of relationships as well as both partners' well-being. For example, encountering goal conflict situations results in increases in stress and negative mood and decreases in satisfaction with the relationship (Righetti, Gere, Visserman, Hoffman, & Van Lange, 2016). Also, when relationship partners engage in activities that meet only one of the partner's goals (i.e., goal-incongruent activities), they experience declines in closeness and affective well-being compared to their baseline levels, regardless of whether the activity meets only one's own or only the partner's goals (Gere et al., 2011). In contrast, when relationship partners engage in activities that meet both partners' goals (i.e., goal-congruent activities), they experience substantial boosts in their feelings of closeness to one another as well as increases in affective well-being (i.e., high positive and low negative affect; Gere et al., 2011). Furthermore, higher overall levels of goal conflict between relationship partners have been linked to lower relationship quality and subjective well-being for both partners (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). Thus, relationship partners with higher goal conflict fare worse than partners whose goals are more congruent.

Goal adjustment in developing relationships

Almost all of the existing research on goal pursuit in romantic relationships has been conducted with couples who are in relatively well-established relationships. At that stage, partners already know each other quite well, have at least some knowledge of each other's goals, and have established patterns of relating to one another and coordinating their goal pursuits (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008). Thus, much of the goal conflict that exists between partners in established relationships is likely goal conflict that the partners have not been able to resolve during the course of their relationship (although people also adopt new goals over time that may conflict with their partner's goals). In contrast, in developing relationships, partners are becoming acquainted with one another and are beginning to discover each other's goals. When conflict between the partners' goals emerges, they may try to resolve or minimize some of the goal conflict, which may or may not be successful.

Thus, new romantic relationships provide an ideal context to study the processes used to resolve goal conflicts as they emerge. In this study, we examined goal adjustment processes and their consequences in developing relationships. When goal conflict emerges, romantic partners have several options to try to reduce or eliminate the conflict if they are motivated to maintain their relationship. One of the partners can choose to stop pursuing the particular goal that leads to the goal conflict. Research suggests that people's willingness to sacrifice for their relationship is associated with better relationship outcomes (Day & Impett, 2016; Van Lange et al., 1997). Thus, people may opt to drop a goal that conflicts with the partner's goals in an attempt to prioritize and strengthen the relationship. For example, Jane may decide to drop her goal of trying to save money for a car, and instead spend money on outings with Peter.

When people stop pursuing a particular goal, they do not encounter the goal conflict associated with its attempted pursuit, thereby resolving the problems related to that particular goal. However, dropping conflicting goals may not always be feasible or possible, and people may not want to stop pursuing goals they find rewarding. Some goals may be closely tied to people's core values or too central to everyday activities to stop pursuing them. When people do not want to stop pursuing a goal, but desire to maintain their relationship and reduce goal conflict, they may adjust the goal by devaluing its importance. Less important goals are pursued with less effort (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), thus reducing goal conflict. For example, Jane may start to see saving money as less important and adjust her goal to save for a car over a longer time period and still go out to eat and drink with Peter once a week. Although this may not completely eliminate the goal conflict, the less she values the goal, the less it conflicts with Peter's goals. At the same time, Peter could also adjust his goal by devaluing the importance of trying new bars and restaurants. If he also adjusts his goal and compromises, goal conflict is reduced even further. However, relationship partners do not always adjust their own goal to reduce the goal conflict, particularly when the other person has already made adjustments that have reduced the goal conflict to a manageable level and it no longer impacts the relationship negatively. Thus, people can still maintain their relationship and goal pursuit—albeit progressing more slowly—without it resulting in decrements in relationship quality.

Adjusting goals that result in goal conflict by dropping or devaluing the goal can help to eliminate or reduce the negative effects of goal conflict on the relationship, but the goal adjustment itself could also have consequences for the relationship. On the one hand, the devaluing of conflicting goals could promote increases in relationship satisfaction by reducing goal conflict between the partners, resulting in a more harmonious relationship. On the other hand, it is possible that the goal adjustment process is a negative experience, and people might feel some uneasiness about having to adjust their personal goals for their partner to reduce goal conflict, particularly in new relationships. Thus, it is also possible that the devaluing of conflicting goals results in decreases in satisfaction over time. We are not aware of any research that has examined either these goal adjustment processes explicitly or their consequences for the relationship.

Goal adjustment processes might also impact people's commitment to their relationship. Adjusting one's goals for the sake of a relationship could be seen as an investment in the relationship to try to ensure its viability over time. It is well known that

investments in the relationship are tied to higher levels of commitment (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rusbult 1980, 1983). Thus, when individuals invest more in their relationship by devaluing the goals that result in goal conflict, it is possible that such goal adjustment is associated with increases in commitment to the relationship.

The current study

The aim of this study was to examine two goal adjustment processes that partners use when they experience goal conflict in their romantic relationship: whether people stop pursuing specific goals that conflict with their romantic partner's goals and the extent to which they devalue the importance of conflicting goals over time. Furthermore, we also examined whether the devaluing of conflicting goals would be associated with changes in one's own or the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment. Finally, we also sought to examine whether overall levels of goal conflict would be associated with changes in one's own and the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment. We examined these questions in a longitudinal study of newly dating partners and measured goal adjustment processes indirectly, by obtaining two reports of people's goals and examining changes across time. This avoided reporting biases (e.g., social desirability) and provided information on these adjustment processes irrespective of people's awareness of them. We hypothesized that when people feel that they have a goal that conflicts more with their partner's goals than their other goals, they would be more likely to use these goal adjustment processes.

We also examined several potential moderators of the link between goal conflict and goal adjustment to test whether the effects are conditional on relationship or goal-related factors. First, we examined whether goal adjustment in the face of goal conflict is dependent on relationship satisfaction. Given that willingness to sacrifice is associated with higher relationship satisfaction (Van Lange et al., 1997), it is possible that lower satisfaction is associated with less willingness to adjust goals in the face of goal conflict. However, it is also possible that less satisfied people would be more or equally likely to adjust their goal pursuits when encountering goal conflict to try to improve their relationship. Thus, we examined the role of relationship satisfaction in people's likelihood of adjusting their conflicting goals.

Second, we also examined the role of relationship commitment in goal adjustment strategies and tested whether people's use of these strategies would depend on their level of commitment. Higher commitment has been tied to a number of pro-relationship behaviors, such as accommodating a partner's needs, giving up self-interested motives for the sake of the relationship, and forgiving a partner's transgressions (see Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015, for a review). Goal adjustment processes are also pro-relationship behaviors, thus, people with higher levels of commitment to their relationship might be more likely to drop or devalue their goals in the face of goal conflict.

Third, we examined whether overall levels of conflict between the goals of the partners—rather than the conflict regarding specific goals—would influence goal adjustment processes. Partners with higher overall conflict across all of their goals may be more likely to drop or devalue conflicting goals to improve their relationships, as those with low overall goal conflict are less likely to encounter such conflict and need

to make adjustments. Perhaps infrequently occurring goal conflict is less likely to be damaging to the relationship. However, it is also possible that encountering goal conflict is unpleasant, and people are motivated to reduce its occurrence, regardless of its frequency.

Fourth, we also examined if the initial importance of the goal influences goal adjustment. Perhaps goals that are initially less important are more likely to be dropped or devalued when they are associated with goal conflict. However, it might also be the case that less important goals result in less goal conflict because they are pursued with less effort (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), and thus, there is less need to devalue or drop those goals to reduce goal conflict.

In addition, we also examined the potential consequences of devaluing goals and overall goal conflict for the relationship. In order to examine the consequences of devaluing conflicting goals, we calculated how much each person devalued their conflicting goals on average and examined whether devaluing was associated with changes in both their own and their partner's levels of relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment. We did not make any predictions regarding the effects of devaluing goals on changes in relationship satisfaction but expected that devaluing goals would be associated with increases in relationship commitment over time. We also examined the longitudinal effects of overall levels of goal conflict. Prior research has shown that higher overall goal conflict is associated with lower concurrent relationship quality for both partners (Gere & Schimmack, 2013). In the current study, we tested whether overall goal conflict would be associated with declines in relationship satisfaction and commitment over time for both partners.

We recruited a sample of newly dating couples who reported on their goals at an initial time point and then again 3 months later to examine goal adjustment processes. At the initial time point, both members of the couple listed up to six goals that they were actively pursuing and rated the importance of each goal and the degree to which it conflicted with the goals of their partner. At the follow-up session, we gave all participants the list of their goals from their initial session and asked them to indicate if they were still pursuing each goal and rate the current importance of each goal. Thus, we were able to examine changes in goal pursuit and goal importance across time for each goal that participants listed when initially recruited for the study without directly asking them about these goal adjustment processes. Furthermore, the partners also reported on their relationship satisfaction and commitment at both time points. This allowed us to examine whether overall goal conflict, as well as the devaluing of conflicting goals, is associated with changes in relationship satisfaction and commitment, for both the self and the partner. In our analyses, we also tested whether any of our effects were moderated by gender, although we did not expect to find any gender differences.

Method

Participants and procedures

We recruited 78 newly dating opposite-sex couples ($N = 156$) to participate in a larger longitudinal study of romantic relationship development. Couples were recruited

through local online advertisements (Craigslist) and through campus advertisements at a large, urban university. Couples were eligible to participate if both partners agreed to participate, were at least 18 years old, and had been dating for 4 months or less ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.39$) to ensure that they were newly dating (although three couples were dating for 5 months and one for 9 months whose data were not excluded). The mean age of the participants was 21.2 years ($SD = 4.96$), the majority were students (66.5%) or working full-time (9.0%) or part-time (19.4%). Participants represented a wide variety of cultural backgrounds: 51.3% were European, 24.4% were East Asian, 23.7% were South or South-East Asian, and 12.7% were of other cultural backgrounds (total does not add to 100% because participants could indicate multiple cultural backgrounds). The majority of participants indicated that they were dating their partner exclusively (97%).

Relationship partners came into our laboratory together to complete the baseline questionnaires (Time 1), and the partners were invited for the second session via email and/or phone (Time 2) 3 months later if they were still dating. At each session, partners were seated in separate rooms and completed the questionnaires on a computer. Participants were compensated with CAD\$15 for the first session and CAD\$10 for the second session or with course credit for their time. Of the 78 couples who began the study, 59 couples participated in the second session (11 couples broke up and 8 couples dropped out). We used data from the 59 couples ($N = 118$) who participated in both sessions, given our interest in examining changes over time. Couples who broke up by Time 2 were significantly less satisfied with their relationships than those who remained in the study ($r = -.26$, $p = .002$) but there were no differences in reported goal conflict and goal importance.

Measures

Baseline goal importance and goal conflict. Participants listed up to six goals that they were currently actively pursuing using the goal strivings approach (Emmons, 1986, 1999). In this approach, they list goals (“strivings”) that they typically try to pursue from all domains of their lives (e.g., school, work) as well as up to three ways in which they are pursuing each goal to ensure that the goals are actively pursued (Emmons, 1986, 1999). Goals elicited in this manner tend to be goals that people repeatedly pursue and vary on their levels of abstractness, time frame of the goal, and clarity regarding their pursuit. Participants listed an average of 4.86 goals ($SD = 1.41$), and our analyses are based on a total of 554 goals reported.

We then used the Striving Assessment Scales (Emmons, 1986, 1999) to measure several constructs related to participants’ goals. Relevant to the aims of the current study, one of the items assessed baseline importance of each of the goals listed (“How important is the striving to you in your life?”) on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very important*, $M = 4.37$, $SD = .84$). Baseline levels of goal conflict were assessed by participants’ ratings of how much each goal conflicted with their partner’s goals using two items created for this study (“Does this striving conflict with your partner’s strivings?” and “How frequently does you wanting to pursue this striving conflict with your partner’s strivings?” $M = 1.35$, $SD = .69$, $\alpha = .79$). Items were rated on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*) and were averaged for each goal to indicate level of

Table 1. Content categories of the goals listed, goals dropped, and goals devalued.

Goal content	% of Goals	% of Dropped goals	% of Devalued goals
Achievement	30.1	30.8	29.8
Intimacy/affiliation	17.7	13.8	21.8
Relationship-specific goal	14.2	9.2	9
Growth/health	24.9	29.2	23.4
Self-presentation	4.9	12.3	7.4
Independence	4.9	3.1	5.9
Self-defeating	0.7	1.5	1.1
Generativity/spirituality	2.3	0	1.1
Other	0.4	0	0.5
Total %	100	100	100

goal conflict. The overall level of goal conflict for each participant was created by averaging goal conflict ratings across all goals they listed.

Continued goal pursuit and change in goal importance. During the second session, participants were given the goals that they listed during their first session. For each specific goal, they indicated whether they were still pursuing that goal (*yes* = 0, *no* = 1, $M = .12$, $SD = .32$) and rated the current importance of each goal on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very important*, $M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.07$). Thus, using participants' goal importance ratings at both time points, we were able to examine how much the importance of each goal changed based on the degree of goal conflict reported for the given goal. In total, 11.7% of the goals listed at Time 1 were no longer pursued (65 goals dropped, 489 goals still pursued) at Time 2 and 19.6% of goals were devalued (188 devalued, 266 same importance, 93 increased in importance). The content categories of the goals listed by participants are shown in Table 1 as well as the content categories of the goals that were dropped and devalued by people over time.

Devaluing of conflicting goals. In order to examine whether devaluing conflicting goals was associated with any changes in relationship quality over time, we calculated how much each person devalued their goals that were associated with conflict with the partner's goals over time. Thus, for each goal that was associated with some degree of conflict at T1 (i.e., had mean ratings of 2 or higher on the two goal conflict items at T1), we subtracted T2 importance ratings from T1 importance ratings to create a difference score that indicated the change in goal importance from T1 to T2. We then calculated a mean score for each person by averaging across their goals. Thus, each person's score indicates how much they devalued their conflicting goals on average, with higher scores indicating greater devaluing across time ($M = .16$, $SD = 1.12$, range -2 to 3.5).

Relationship quality. Relationship satisfaction was measured at baseline using the 3-item satisfaction subscale of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Participants rated their relationship satisfaction (e.g., "How happy are you with your relationship with your partner?") on 5-point scales (1 = *never/hardly at all*,

5 = *extremely much/always*). Items were averaged for analysis ($M = 4.12$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = .90$). Relationship commitment was measured using the 3-item reliable alliance scale of the Network of Relationships Inventory (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). Participant indicated their commitment to their relationship (e.g., “How sure are you that your relationship will last no matter what?”) on 5-point scales (1 = *never/hardly at all*, 5 = *extremely much/always*). Items were averaged for analysis ($M = 3.50$, $SD = .1.07$, $\alpha = .89$).

Results

We first present the analyses that tested the hypotheses that people would be more likely to stop pursuing a goal by Time 2 that they have reported as conflicting with the goals of their partner at Time 1, and to devalue conflicting goals over time, as evidenced by decreases in the reported importance of such goals. We then present the analyses that tested the associations between the devaluing of goals and changes in relationship quality (i.e., relationship satisfaction and commitment) over time and the associations between overall goal conflict and changes in relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Changes in goal pursuit and goal importance

Data analysis. We conducted multilevel regression analyses in order to account for the nonindependence of the observations using the software HLM (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The analysis was conducted as a 3-level model because goals (Level 1) are nested within persons (Level 2), who are nested within dyads (Level 3). We estimated random intercepts and fixed slopes. Our main predictor variable was the level of goal conflict regarding a given goal at Time 1, which was centered around each person’s own mean goal conflict ratings across all their listed goals. Thus, our analysis tested whether people were more likely to stop pursuing or devalue, by Time 2, each specific goal that conflicted with their partner’s goals at Time 1 more than their goals conflicted with their partner’s goals on average. We chose this analysis method because it eliminates the effects of individual differences in average reported levels of goal conflict on the results. People are most likely to focus on adjusting goals that are associated with higher levels of conflict compared to their other goals, as the level of goal conflict salient to people will in part depend on the average level of goal conflict they experience with their partner’s goals.

We first ran null models (i.e., models with no predictors) predicting each of the outcomes to examine the proportion of variance at each level of the outcome. For Time 2 goal importance, 80% of the variance in scores was at the goal level (Level 1), 20% of the variance was at the person level (Level 2), and 0% of the variance was at the dyad level (Level 3). For dropping of goals, 68% of the variance in scores was at the goal level (Level 1), 23% of the variance was at the person level (Level 2), and 9% of the variance was at the dyad level (Level 3).

Continued goal pursuit. First, we focused on changes in the pursuit of specific goals based on the degree of goal conflict participants reported between the given goal and their

partner's goals. We predicted that participants would be more likely to stop pursuing a goal if they reported that their pursuit of that goal conflicted with the goals of their partner. We conducted multilevel logistic regression analysis due to the dichotomous nature of the outcome of whether participants still pursued the goal at Time 2 (*yes* = 0 or *no* = 1). Our predictor was the person-centered level of goal conflict regarding the given goal at Time 1. Results indicated that the more a given goal conflicted with the partner's goals, the more likely people were to drop that goal by Time 2 ($B = .61, SE = .29, p = .036$). The odds ratio estimate was 1.84 (CI [1.04, 3.26]), indicating that people were 1.84 times more likely to drop a goal with each unit increase in goal conflict. We also repeated these analyses controlling for Time 1 goal importance to test whether Time 1 goal conflict predicted the dropping of goals even when we accounted for the initial importance of the goal. In this analysis, as expected, the importance of the goal was associated with a lower likelihood of dropping the goal ($B = -.62, SE = .21, p = .004$, odds ratio .54, 95% CI [.35, .82]). Goal conflict also continued to predict higher odds of dropping the goal ($B = .64, SE = .30, p = .030$, odds ratio 1.90, 95% CI [1.06, 3.39]).

Changes in goal importance. We next focused on changes in the reported importance of goals that participants indicated conflicted with their partner's goals at Time 1. We predicted that people would be more likely to devalue goals that conflict with their partner's goals, as indicated by decreases in importance ratings over time. Our outcome was the importance rating of the goal at Time 2. In addition to the level of conflict regarding the specific goal at Time 1, we also included Time 1 importance of that goal as a predictor because we were interested in changes in importance (T1 goal importance was a significant predictor of T2 goal importance, $B = .49, SE = .06, p < .001$). Results indicated that, as expected, the more a given goal conflicted with the partner's goals at Time 1, the more people devalued that goal over time ($B = -.17, SE = .08, p = .039$).

Testing potential moderators. In addition to our main analyses, we tested the effects of several potential moderators of these associations, including gender, relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, overall levels of goal conflict, and goal importance. As expected, gender did not moderate the effects, suggesting that our effects are applicable to both men and women. The effects were also not moderated by participants' levels of relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, overall levels of goal conflict, or the initial importance of the particular goal. Thus, we were unable to find evidence of moderation of these effects in our data.

Consequences of devaluing goals and overall goal conflict

Data analysis. We once again conducted multilevel regression analyses in order to account for nonindependence using HLM (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The analyses were conducted as two-level models (persons nested within dyads) and estimated random intercepts and fixed slopes. Our main predictor variable in the first set of analyses was each person's devaluing of conflicting goals, which was grand-mean centered, and in the second set of analyses, was the grand-mean centered overall goal conflict. We tested whether devaluing of goals, and overall levels of goal conflict were associated

with changes in one's own and the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment over time. Thus, our outcome variables were the Time 2 relationship outcome variables, and we controlled for the corresponding Time 1 relationship outcome score in each model (grand-mean centered).

We once again ran null models predicting each outcome (Time 2 satisfaction and commitment) to examine the proportion of variance at each level of analysis in the outcome variables. For Time 2 relationship satisfaction, 30.0% of the variance was at the level of the dyad and 70.0% of the variance was at the person level. For Time 2 relationship commitment, 46.2% of the variance was at the dyad level and 53.8% of the variance was at the person level.

Devaluing of conflicting goals. In our first analysis, we tested whether devaluing of conflicting goals was associated with changes in one's own relationship satisfaction over time. Given that we were interested in changes in relationship satisfaction, we entered Time 1 relationship satisfaction into the model as a control variable, which was a significant predictor of Time 2 relationship satisfaction ($B = .51, SE = .10, p < .001$). However, the devaluing of conflicting goals was not associated with any changes in one's own satisfaction over time ($B = -.04, SE = .08, p = .560$).

Next, we examined whether goal devaluing would be associated with changes in one's own relationship commitment over time. We controlled for Time 1 relationship commitment, which was a significant predictor of Time 2 commitment ($B = .80, SE = .10, p < .001$). We found that the devaluing of conflicting goals was associated with increases in one's own commitment over time ($B = .20, SE = .09, p = .031$), such that the more people devalued their goals that conflicted with their partner's goals, the more committed they became to their relationship over time.

We also examined associations between goal devaluing and changes in the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment. The partner's Time 1 relationship satisfaction predicted their Time 2 satisfaction ($B = .55, SE = .10, p < .001$), but one's own devaluing of conflicting goals was unrelated to changes in the partner's satisfaction ($B = -.08, SE = .08, p = .247$). Similarly, the partner's Time 1 relationship commitment predicted their Time 2 commitment ($B = .74, SE = .09, p < .001$), but one's own devaluing of conflicting goals was unrelated to changes in the partner's commitment ($B = -.04, SE = .09, p = .657$).

Overall levels of goal conflict. We first examined concurrent associations between goal conflict and relationship satisfaction to see if we can replicate prior research. We found that indeed, higher reports of goal conflict were associated with lower relationship satisfaction ($B = -.42, SE = .10, p < .001$). Goal conflict was not associated with relationship commitment and the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment.

We next tested whether the overall level of goal conflict people reported was associated with changes in people's own relationship satisfaction over time. We once again entered Time 1 relationship satisfaction into the model, which was a significant predictor of Time 2 relationship satisfaction ($B = .51, SE = .08, p < .001$). Overall goal conflict was also marginally associated with Time 2 relationship satisfaction ($B = -.19,$

$SE = .10, p = .059$), such that people who reported higher levels of goal conflict across their goals experienced decreases in their relationship satisfaction over time.

Next, we examined whether overall goal conflict is associated with changes in one's own relationship commitment over time. We controlled for Time 1 relationship commitment, which was a significant predictor of Time 2 commitment ($B = .71, SE = .07, p < .001$). However, overall goal conflict was not associated with changes in one's own commitment over time ($B = -.07, SE = .13, p = .596$).

We also examined associations between overall goal conflict and changes in the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment. The partner's Time 1 relationship satisfaction predicted their Time 2 satisfaction ($B = .56, SE = .07, p < .001$), but one's own reported goal conflict was unrelated to changes in the partner's satisfaction ($B = -.11, SE = .09, p = .236$). Similarly, the partner's Time 1 relationship commitment predicted their Time 2 commitment ($B = .71, SE = .07, p < .001$), but one's own reported goal conflict was unrelated to changes in the partner's commitment ($B = -.06, SE = .12, p = .602$).

Testing moderation by gender. For each of the effects of devaluing conflicting goals on own and partner relationship satisfaction and commitment, we tested whether gender was a significant moderator. Gender did not moderate the effects of devaluing goals on one's own relationship satisfaction or commitment. Gender also did not moderate the effects of devaluing goals on the partner's commitment. However, we did find moderation effects for the partner's relationship satisfaction ($B = .33, SE = .15, p = .034$), such that women's devaluing of their own conflicting goals was unrelated to changes in men's relationship satisfaction ($B = -.04, SE = .08, p = .606$), but men's devaluing of their own conflicting goals was associated with decreases in women's relationship satisfaction over time ($B = -.17, SE = .08, p = .027$).

Finally, for each of the effects of overall goal conflict on own and partner relationship satisfaction and commitment, we tested whether gender moderated any of the effects. In all cases, gender was not a significant moderator of the associations between goal conflict and relationship satisfaction and commitment, for either the actor or the partner effects.

Discussion

In sum, using a longitudinal sample of newly dating couples, we found that when people reported higher levels of goal conflict between a specific goal they pursued and their romantic partner's goals, they were more likely to stop pursuing that goal over time. Higher goal conflict was also associated with decreases in the importance that people placed on the specific conflicting goal across time. Furthermore, our findings indicated that the devaluing of conflicting goals was coupled with increases in relationship commitment over time. At the same time, women experienced decreases in their relationship satisfaction to the extent that their partner devalued their conflicting goals. These results suggest that in developing relationships, when people have a goal that conflicts with their romantic partner's goals, they attempt to reduce the goal conflict by choosing to stop pursuing the goal and by devaluing the importance of the particular goal

that conflicts with their partner's goals. The presence of goal conflict was associated with lower relationship satisfaction and decreases in satisfaction over time.

Our findings add to a growing literature on the crucial importance that relationship partners play in shaping one another's goal pursuits (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Fitzsimons et al., 2015). Whereas some relationship factors enhance goal pursuit and progress, such as the partner's support of a goal (e.g., Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010; Rafaeli, Cranford, Green, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008) and a partner's beliefs in one's efficacy (Gere, Martire, Keefe, Stephens, & Schulz, 2014), other relationship factors may inhibit goal progress. Our findings suggest that goal conflict may result in dropping or devaluing a goal, inhibiting goal pursuit and progress. Furthermore, given that we focused on newly developing relationships, whereas prior work has focused on more established couples, the results suggest that relationship partners begin to influence goal pursuit processes quite early on, before relationships are well established and grow in interdependence and commitment.

Research suggests that accommodating relationship partners' needs is important for a high quality relationship (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003, 2008; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994) and some willingness to sacrifice to meet the partner's needs can have benefits (Van Lange et al., 1997), particularly if people sacrifice out of a genuine motivation to further the well-being of their partner or the relationship (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Impett, Gere, Kogan, Gordon, & Keltner, 2014; Impett & Gordon, 2008). However, the mutuality of such accommodation is also likely to be important. In the current study, we were unable to assess whether the partner also made adjustments to their goals to reduce the conflict related to a particular goal because we were not able to match up goals across partners that conflicted with one another, and thus we do not know to what extent these adjustment processes reflected compromise between the partners or the efforts of only one partner. For example, to reach a compromise, one person may devalue a goal so that their partner can keep their goal, and in exchange the partner might devalue another goal to allow the other partner to keep a conflicting goal. In future work, it will be important to assess the dyadic nature of goal adjustment, and how one partner's goal adjustment relates to the other partner's goal adjustment regarding specific goals. Thus, it will be important for future research to obtain data where conflicting goals can be matched up across partners and compromises between the partners can be explicitly studied.

Individuals and relationships benefit the most when people are able to balance pursuing their own needs and meeting the needs of their romantic partner (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2008). Thus, although people may give up the pursuit or devalue the importance of some of their goals, particularly those that conflict with their partner's goals, it is still important to maintain one's own goal pursuits. Dropping or devaluing goals may not always be beneficial—and may even be harmful—if it results in personal needs not being appropriately met. In our study, we found that goal adjustment was associated with increasing relationship commitment, which is in line with other work suggesting that pro-relationship behaviors are associated with higher commitment (Agnew & VanderDrift, 2015). We did not find evidence that devaluing of conflicting goals is associated with declines in satisfaction with the relationship; however, such declines in relationship quality and well-being may be associated with the devaluing or

dropping of specific types of goals. For example, it may be harmful if people devalue specific goals that are central to their identity or goals that bring them personal satisfaction. As such, devaluing of specific types of goals may at times be harmful, but not overall attempts to adjust conflicting goals, which, in our study, promoted increased commitment to the relationship.

However, we did find evidence of declines in relationship satisfaction for women, when their partners devalued conflicting goals. It will be important to replicate these findings in future work and examine potential reasons why women show such declines in relationship satisfaction. One possibility is that because women are still culturally expected to make sacrifices for their partner and make more sacrifices in some areas, such as career, sexuality, and health (Impett & Gordon, 2008), when such norms are violated, and men adjust their goal pursuits, women become less satisfied with the relationship. Another possibility might be that men make it known to their partner when they devalue their goals to benefit their relationship, resulting in women feeling guilty about it, thus resulting in drops in satisfaction, whereas for men, there are no changes in satisfaction. In future research, it will be important to examine the consequences of goal adjustment processes in more detail and the conditions under which adjusting specific types of goals may be helpful or harmful for individual and relationship well-being.

It is worth noting that the goal adjustment processes we examined are likely just a part of people's overall approach to effective goal coordination with their partner. Some goals are dropped or devalued and modified to reduce the degree of conflict with the partner's goals, perhaps especially when the partner also adjusts their goals to enable mutual compromise. However, new goals are likely adopted in place of those that have been dropped or become less important. Some new goals may be specific to the relationship (e.g., wanting to spend more time together) and become more important and increase in number as relationships develop, or there may be other types of goals that are more congruent with the partner's goals. For example, if someone's romantic partner is highly invested in healthy eating, his or her meal preferences may change over time, even resulting in adopting the same goal and making goal pursuit easier. Partners may even rely on each other to ensure successful goal progress (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011). Additionally, over time, people may also come to value their existing goals more that are congruent with their partner's goals, if they can be easily pursued. It will be important to examine the use of such other goal adjustment processes in future research.

In the current study, we also examined several potential moderators of goal adjustment processes. However, we did not find any evidence that relationship satisfaction, relationship commitment, overall goal conflict, initial goal importance, or gender moderated these effects. On the one hand, it is possible that these factors do not moderate these effects and the experience of encountering goal conflict with one's partner is uncomfortable and stressful, and people are motivated to try to reduce it as much as possible regardless of these potential moderating factors. On the other hand, it is also possible that with our current sample we did not have enough power to detect the presence of such moderating effects. We only had data from 118 people (59 dyads), which may have been a small sample to allow sufficient power to explore between-person moderators. Thus, the lack of evidence for moderating factors in the current research should be interpreted with caution. In future research, it will be important to

examine these and other potential moderators of goal adjustment with a larger sample that yields adequate power to detect between-person moderation effects to gain a better understanding of when and who may be motivated to adjust their goals in the face of goal conflict. For example, recent work shows that individuals with higher empathy experience higher negative affect when faced with a situation of conflict between their own and their partner's goals (Righetti et al., 2016). Thus, empathy may be one possible moderating factor of goal adjustment, as people with higher empathy may be more motivated to reduce any goal conflict.

Our findings are also in line with prior work that has shown that goal conflict has negative effects on people's well-being and relationships (Gere & Schimmack, 2013; Gere et al., 2011; Righetti et al., 2016). Our findings indicated that those who reported higher overall goal conflict reported lower relationship satisfaction and that such goal conflict was associated with declines in relationship satisfaction over time (although the latter effect was only marginally significant). Thus, it is likely that people want to reduce goal conflict for the sake of their relationship and goal adjustment processes are one avenue through which they attempt to eliminate goal conflict and its potential negative effects. As the relationship develops, and interdependence and commitment increase, people may also try to proactively prevent the emergence of goal conflict by setting their goals together with their partner. Such cooperative goal setting has recently been shown to predict higher relationship stability over the long term (Gere, Almeida, & Martire, 2016).

The major strengths of this study are the sample of newly dating couples and the longitudinal assessment of people's goals over time without directly asking about goal adjustment processes, which provide insights into processes used to deal with goal conflict in early stages of relationship development without relying on people's awareness of goal adjustment. However, it is important to note that these processes may operate differently in more established relationships. For example, the potential moderators we examined may function differently in established relationships, where goal coordination occurs in the context of a history of prior interactions and greater levels of prior investment and commitment. Thus, examining goal adjustment processes in established relationships is an important direction for future research. To assess goal adjustment processes among established romantic partners, it may be best to focus on important relationship and life transitions, when one or both partners' goals are likely to change (e.g., transition to parenthood), and adjustment processes can be more easily identified and examined over time.

In sum, the current study showed that romantic partners indeed have an important influence on people's goal pursuits, and that such influence begins to take place early on in relationships. In a sample of newly dating couples, we found that across time, people were more likely to stop pursuing or devalue goals that were associated with conflict with their romantic partner's goals. Furthermore, adjusting one's goals was associated with increases in relationship commitment, whereas overall levels of goal conflict were associated with decreases in relationship satisfaction over time. These findings indicate that when conflict between the goals of relationship partners emerges in developing relationships, they attempt to reduce the goal conflict by using a variety of goal adjustment processes, which have consequences for the relationship itself. In future

work, it will be important to examine these and other goal adjustment processes to gain a better understanding of what types of goals can be adjusted and of other means of reducing goal conflict in order to foster healthy relationships.

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