

Good, Giving, and Game: The Relationship Benefits of Communal Sexual Motivation

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Abstract

In two dyadic studies (a short-term longitudinal study and a daily experience study), we demonstrate that people high in sexual communal strength (i.e., those motivated to meet a romantic partner's sexual needs) have partners who are more satisfied with and committed to their relationships. In Study 1, people higher in sexual communal strength had partners who felt more satisfied and committed to the relationship both at that time and 3 weeks later. In Study 2, the partners of people high in sexual communal strength perceived their partners as more responsive to their needs during sex, and this was one reason why they reported feeling more satisfied and committed in the relationship. Implications for theories of communal motivation and approaches to sexuality in romantic relationships are discussed.

Keywords

sexuality, romantic relationships, motivation/goals, close relationships, helping/prosocial behavior

GGG stands for good, giving, and game, which is what we should all strive to be for our sex partners. Think good in bed, giving based on a partner's sexual interests, and game for anything—within reason.

—Dan Savage

Popular sex advice columnist Dan Savage suggests that it is important to consider and place a premium on meeting a partner's sexual needs in a relationship. Since most partnered sexual behavior occurs in established intimate relationships (see reviews by Impett, Muise, & Peragine, 2014; Willetts, Sprecher, & Beck, 2004), romantic partners play a key role in promoting each other's sexual fulfillment. Thus, it seems likely that people should feel especially satisfied with and committed to their relationships if they have a partner who is highly motivated to meet their sexual needs. In this article, we draw on theories of communal motivation (Clark & Mills, 2012) and perceived partner responsiveness (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), to test the prediction that people who are highly motivated to meet their partner's sexual needs (i.e., those high in *sexual communal strength*; see Muise, Impett, Kogan, & Desmarais, 2013) have partners who detect this responsiveness and, in turn, feel more satisfied and committed to their relationship.

Sexual Activity and Relationship Satisfaction

Both the frequency and quality of sexual interactions contribute to satisfaction in romantic relationships (Byers, 2005; Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). Men and women who report engaging in more frequent sex report higher sexual

and relationship satisfaction (Laumann et al., 1994) and are less likely to breakup (Breznyak & Whisman, 2004; Traeen, 2010; Yabiku & Gager, 2009). Research has also shown that the extent to which one person perceives the sexual relationship as rewarding versus costly contributes to their romantic partner's sexual satisfaction above and beyond the partner's own reports of rewards and costs (see review by Byers & Wang, 2004).

At the same time that sexuality is a key component of relationship quality, decisions about when and how frequently to engage in sex can be highly contentious issues in some relationships (Risch, Riley, & Lawler, 2003). Romantic partners will inevitably encounter times in which their sexual interests differ (Impett & Peplau, 2003); couples may disagree about whether or not to have sex on a particular occasion or the specific activities in which they wish to engage (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Byers & Lewis, 1988; O'Sullivan & Byers, 1996). Given that the frequency and quality of sex are associated with relationship satisfaction and that partners will inevitably differ in their sexual preferences, it is important to consider whether being motivated to meet a partner's sexual needs ultimately benefits relationships.

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A Communal Approach to Sexual Relationships

In close relationships, people can vary in the extent to which they feel responsible for meeting their partner's needs (Clark & Mills, 1993), termed *communal strength* (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004). People high in communal strength give benefits to their partner based on their partner's needs without the expectation of direct reciprocation and have been shown to experience benefits for the *self* (Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster, & Cheng, 2013), such as increased feelings of gratitude (Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010) and greater satisfaction when making a sacrifice for their romantic partner (Kogan et al., 2010). Recently, we extended theories of communal motivation to the domain of sexuality and found that people who are high (compared to low) in sexual communal strength experience higher sexual desire for their partner, both in daily life and over time in long-term relationships (Muise et al., 2013).

The next critical step in this line of work is to investigate the potential benefits of being involved in a relationship with a *partner* who is high in sexual communal strength. Only one study to date has investigated the partner effects of communal motivation and found that, controlling for one's own communal strength, a partner's communal strength was associated with greater marital satisfaction (Mills et al., 2004). Given that sexual behavior is important for maintaining fulfilling intimate relationships (Dindia, 2000), in this study, we consider, for the first time, if and how a person's level of sexual communal strength is associated with their partner's relationship quality. Previous research has demonstrated that sexual compliance (i.e., engaging in sex when it is not personally desired) is associated with greater relationship satisfaction and commitment (Impett & Peplau, 2002; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). In addition, research has shown that individuals who make more frequent changes in their sexual habits to accommodate a partner, such as changes to sexual frequency or type of sexual activity, have partners who report greater relationship satisfaction (Burke & Young, 2012). Taken together, the studies in this small but growing literature suggest that there are a variety of ways that people can meet their partner's sexual needs and that doing so can be beneficial for the self. What we do not yet know, however, is whether being high in sexual communal strength benefits one's romantic partner and if so, why this might be the case.

Perceived Partner Responsiveness

Close relationships scholars have suggested that perceived partner responsiveness, the extent to which a person feels that their partner is aware and supportive of their needs, is a critical component of intimate relationships (Reis et al., 2004). Although people can detect a partner's responsiveness with at least some degree of accuracy (Abbey, Andrews, & Halman, 1995; Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007; Vinokur, Schul, & Caplan, 1987), the social support literature includes mixed findings about the consequences

of perceiving a partner's support. Support that is provided to the partner, but not perceived, termed invisible support, is associated with the most positive consequences, whereas social support that is perceived can have neutral, or even negative, consequences (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Shrout, Herman, & Bolger, 2006). Other research has found that when one partner displays responsiveness in daily life (e.g., kind gestures and responsive touch), the other partner perceives it, and in turn, reports greater feelings of relationship intimacy (Debrot, Cook, Perez, & Horn, 2012). Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, and Strachman (2012) argue that these differential effects of perceiving support are related to the *nature* of the event. Providing responsive support to negative events is more risky, as it may involve the recipient feeling resentful toward his or her partner; however, receiving responsive support for positive events is more consistently associated with positive consequences such as higher relationship satisfaction. Previous research indicates that, in nonclinical samples of couples, the overwhelming majority of sexual experiences are positive in nature (e.g., Impett, Strachman, Finkel, & Gable, 2008). Based on this work, we expect that perceiving a romantic partner as responsive to one's needs in the domain of sexuality will be linked with increased relationship quality.

The Current Studies

We conducted two studies of married and cohabiting couples to test the prediction that people who are motivated to meet their partner's sexual needs will have romantic partners who report higher relationship satisfaction and commitment. Study 1 was a short-term longitudinal study of 118 couples designed to provide an initial test of these predictions. Study 2 was a daily experience study of 44 couples designed to replicate the results of Study 1 by linking sexual communal strength with a romantic partner's reports of daily relationship quality and to test perceived partner sexual responsiveness as a mechanism of this effect.

Study 1

Participants and Procedure

We recruited 118 heterosexual couples from the United States through Craigslist. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 74 ($M = 31.5$, $SD = 10.4$) and had been in their current relationship from 4 months to 30 years ($M = 4.9$ years, $SD = 5.3$ years). All the couples were living together; 37% were married and 19% were engaged. About a third of the couples had children (31%), and of these, most had two children ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 1.1$). Participants comprised a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds; 55% were European, 14% were African American, 8% were Asian, 5% were Latino, 3% were Native American, 1% were Indian, and 14% self-identified as "other." Couples who agreed to participate were e-mailed a link to a 30-min online survey. Three weeks later, both partners were asked to participate in a follow-up survey online. One hundred and sixty-nine participants (72%) completed the follow-up. In between the two time points, participants completed

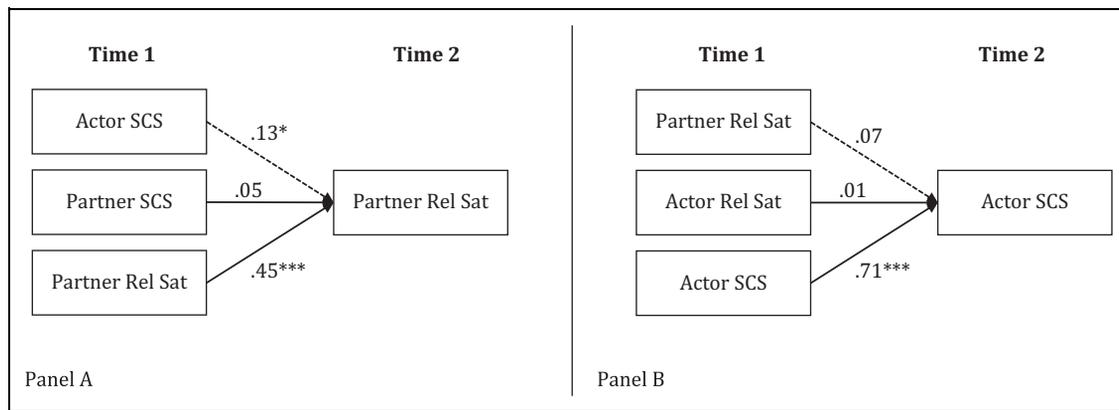


Figure 1. Time lagged analyses comparing two causal pathways: actor's sexual communal strength (SCS) at Time 1 predicting partner's relationship satisfaction (Rel Sat) at Time 2, controlling for the partner's SCS and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 (panel A); partner's relationship satisfaction at Time 1 predicting actor's SCS at Time 2, controlling for actor's SCS and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 (panel B). Values are unstandardized; dashed lines indicate pathways of interest.

Note. * $p < .10$, *** $p < .001$.

a 21-day daily experience study. Each partner was paid US\$40 for participating.

Measures

Participants completed all measures at both time points on 7-point scales. Participants completed a 6-item measure of *sexual communal strength* (Muise et al., 2013) that was adapted from the Mills, Clark, Ford, and Johnson (2004) measure. They rated items such as "How far would you be willing to go to meet your partner's sexual needs?" (background: $M = 5.56$, $SD = .94$, $\alpha = .70$; follow-up: $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.02$, $\alpha = .73$). To measure *communal strength*, participants completed Mills et al.'s (2004) 10-item measure, with items such as "How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of your partner?" (background: $M = 5.87$, $SD = .74$, $\alpha = .73$; follow-up: $M = 5.83$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = .74$). Participants also completed the Perceived Relationship Quality Component (PRQC) inventory (Fletcher, Simpson & Thomas, 2000), which included 3 items to assess *relationship satisfaction* (background: $M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = .94$; follow-up: $M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.13$, $\alpha = .96$) and 3 items to assess *commitment* (background: $M = 6.53$, $SD = .84$, $\alpha = .94$; follow-up: $M = 6.51$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .97$). In the daily experience portion of the study, participants responded to 1 item about their *daily relationship satisfaction* ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.40$) and 1 item about their *daily commitment* ($M = 6.15$, $SD = 1.35$) from the PRQC inventory (Fletcher et al., 2000).

Results

We analyzed the data with multilevel modeling in SPSS 20.0. To account for the nonindependence in our data, we tested a two-level model where persons are nested within dyads. The actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) guided the analyses, such that actor and partner scores on sexual communal strength were entered simultaneously as

predictors of relationship quality, allowing us to test the effect of a person's sexual communal strength on their partner's relationship quality controlling for the effect of their partner's own sexual communal strength. In our analyses, dyads were indistinguishable, and the data follow a pairwise (or double-entry) structure (Kenny et al., 2006; see Online Supplement A). All predictors were grand mean-centered and all analyses in Study 1 reflect between-person differences. See Online Supplement B for the zero-order correlations.

First, we tested our predicted associations using the data from Time 1 and the daily experience study. Analyses of the cross-sectional data at Time 1 provided support for our predictions. After controlling for the partner's own level of sexual communal strength, which was significantly associated with their relationship satisfaction, $b = .32$, $t(205.24) = 4.33$, $p < .001$, and commitment, $b = .26$, $t(222.16) = 4.76$, $p < .001$, the higher a person was in sexual communal strength, the greater their romantic partner's relationship satisfaction, $b = .24$, $t(205.24) = 3.26$, $p < .001$, and commitment, $b = .12$, $t(222.16) = 2.25$, $p = .03$. We replicated these associations for daily reports of relationship quality as well. Controlling for their own level of sexual communal strength (which was significantly associated with their own feelings of daily relationship satisfaction, $b = .18$, $t(117.90) = 2.83$, $p = .01$, and commitment, $b = .24$, $t(114.25) = 3.67$, $p < .001$, people whose partners were higher sexual communal strength in the background survey reported higher daily relationship satisfaction, $b = .20$, $t(117.96) = 3.26$, $p = .001$, and commitment, $b = .27$, $t(114.11) = 4.00$, $p < .001$. Next, we wanted to determine whether a person's sexual communal strength predicts their partner's relationship quality above and beyond the person's own relationship quality. However, when we reran the analyses controlling for actor relationship quality, actor sexual communal strength was no longer a significant predictor of partner's relationship quality ($ps > .15$).

Next, as depicted in Figure 1, we tested the predicted associations over time and attempted to provide support for the

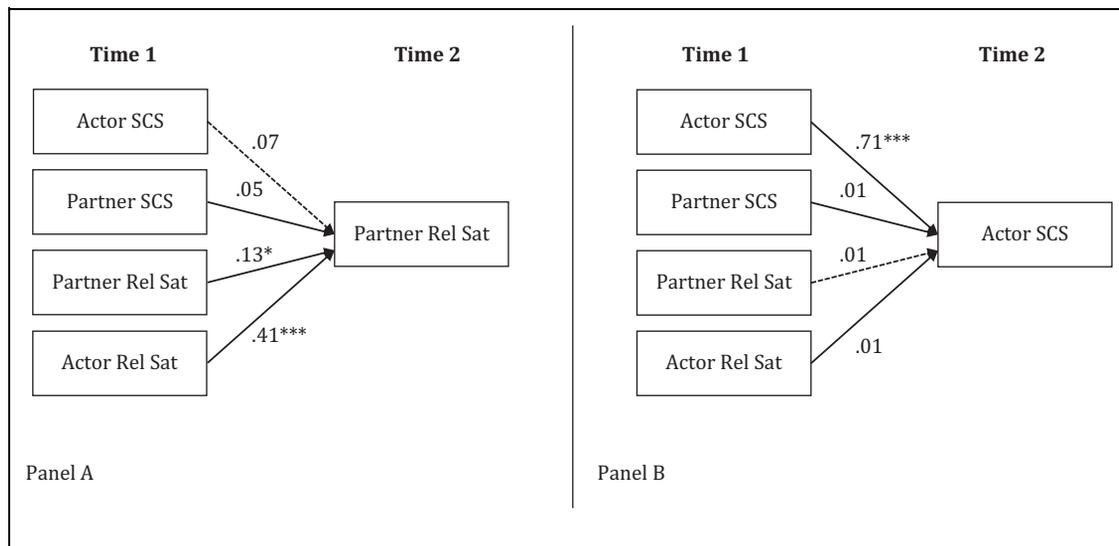


Figure 2. Time lagged analyses comparing two causal pathways: actor's sexual communal strength (SCS) at Time 1 predicting partner's relationship satisfaction at Time 2, controlling for both partners' SCS and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 (panel A); partner's relationship satisfaction at Time 1 predicting actor's SCS at Time 2, controlling for both partners' SCS and relationship satisfaction at Time 1 (panel B). Values are unstandardized; dashed lines indicate pathways of interest.

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

predicted causal pathway compared to an alternative causal pathway where a person's relationship quality promotes their partner's sexual communal strength (for a similar APIM over-time analyses, see Pollman & Finkenauer, 2009). The findings provide support for the predicted causal pathway where people higher in sexual communal strength at Time 1 had partners who reported marginally higher relationship satisfaction, $b = .13$, $t(119.54) = 1.64$, $p = .10$, and significantly higher commitment, $b = .14$, $t(123.96) = 1.99$, $p < .05$, at Time 2, controlling for the partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment at Time 1. We did not find support for the alternative causal pathway where a partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment at Time 1 predicted the actor's sexual communal strength at Time 2, controlling for the actor's sexual communal strength and relationship quality at Time 1 (see Figure 1 for relationship satisfaction, $b = .07$; for partner's commitment at Time 1 predicting actor's sexual communal strength at Time 2, $b = .08$, both $ps > .26$). However, as depicted in Figure 2, after controlling for both partners' relationship satisfaction and sexual communal strength at Time 1, a person's sexual communal strength at Time 1 did not significantly predict their partner's relationship satisfaction at Time 2. As in the main analyses, we compared this to an alternative causal pathway, controlling for the same Time 1 variables, and a partner's relationship quality at Time 1 did not significantly predict actor's sexual communal strength at Time 2 (see Figure 2 for relationship satisfaction; commitment follows the same pattern).

In a final set of analyses, we sought to rule out additional alternative explanations for our effects. Sexual communal strength was significantly correlated with general communal strength ($r = .45$, $p < .001$), but after controlling for communal strength, the link between sexual communal strength

and the partner's relationship quality remained significant. Men ($M = 5.69$, $SD = .91$) reported higher sexual communal strength than women, $M = 5.42$, $SD = .95$; $t(234) = -2.28$, $p = .02$. However, all of our effects held controlling for gender and gender did not significantly moderate our effects. Finally, relationship duration, or the presence children were not significantly correlated with sexual communal strength and did not moderate the effects.

Study 2

The results of our initial study suggest that people who are motivated to meet their partner's sexual needs do, in fact, have partners who are happier and more committed to their relationships. However, this effect is at least partially accounted for by the person's own relationship quality. In Study 2, we extend these initial findings by measuring relationship quality on a daily basis and by testing perceived partner sexual responsiveness as a mechanism. In particular, we test the prediction that people higher in sexual communal strength have partners who report higher daily relationship quality because they are perceived by their partners as more responsive to their needs during sex.

Participants and Procedure

Forty-four mixed-sex couples were recruited from the Greater Toronto Area to participate in a 21-day daily experience study. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 61 ($M = 36.0$, $SD = 8.7$), and had been in their current relationship from 3 to 39 years ($M = 11.1$, $SD = 8.8$); 68% of the couples were married and 32% were cohabitating. Approximately half of the couples had

children (48%), and of these, most had one or two children ($M = 1.8$, $SD = 1.1$). Most of the participants (82%) identified as White/Caucasian.

After both partners agreed to take part in the study, the participants were e-mailed a link to the online survey. Both members of the couple were instructed to begin the study on the same day. On the first day, the couples completed a longer background survey and then completed a 10-minute survey each night for 21 consecutive days. Participants completed 1,560 diary entries for an average of 17.7 (out of 21) entries per person. Each partner was paid \$40 CAD.

Measures

Participants completed the same measures of *sexual communal strength* ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .52$, rated on a 5-point scale; $\alpha = .77$) *communal strength* ($M = 5.79$, $SD = .69$, rated on a 7-point scale; $\alpha = .78$) as in Study 1. All of the daily measures were completed on 7-point scales. Each day participants responded to 3 items about their *relationship satisfaction* ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.03$; $\alpha = .94$) and 3 items about *commitment* ($M = 6.31$, $SD = .95$; $\alpha = .94$) from the Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) scale. Each day, participants responded to a 1-item indicator of sexual desire (Impett et al., 2008; Muise et al., 2013): “I felt a great deal of sexual desire for my partner today” ($M = 4.76$, $SD = 1.70$). Finally, on days when participants engaged in sex, they responded to a 1-item indicator of *perceived partner sexual responsiveness* (Birnbaum, Reis, Gillath, & Orpaz, 2006): “During sex, my partner was responsive to my needs” ($M = 5.92$, $SD = 1.36$). On average, participants reported engaging in sex with their partner on three (out of 21 possible) days ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 2.33$, Range = 1 to 10 days).

Results

We analyzed the data with multilevel modeling in SPSS 20.0. We tested a two-level cross model with random intercepts where persons are nested within dyads, and person and days are crossed to account for the fact that both partners completed the daily surveys on the same days (Kenny et al., 2006). Person-level measures (i.e., sexual communal strength) were grand mean centered and reflect between-person differences. Daily-level predictors (i.e., perceived partner sexual responsiveness) were person-mean centered, a technique that controls for between-person differences and assesses day-to-day changes from a participant’s own mean, and reflect within-person differences (coefficients for the daily analyses represent changes in the dependent variable for every one-unit deviation from the person’s own mean). The analyses were guided by the APIM, and the data followed a person-period pairwise structure (Kenny et al., 2006; see Online Supplement C). For the multi-level mediation, the nature of our data calls for a 2-1-1 mediation (Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009), where perceived partner responsiveness (Level-1 variable) mediates the association between sexual communal strength (Level-2 variable) and daily relationship quality (Level-1 variable); a 2-1-1

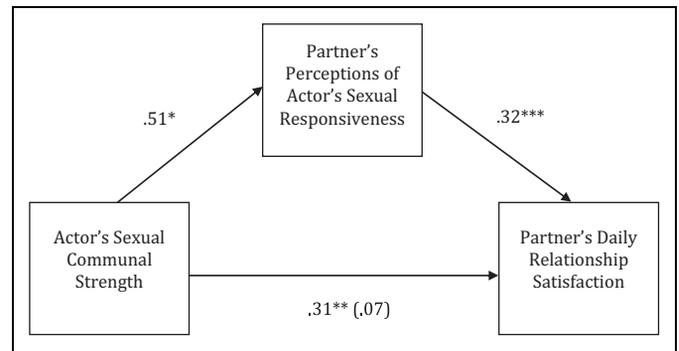


Figure 3. Perceived partner responsiveness during sex (averaged over the course of the diary study) mediates the association between actor’s sexual communal strength and partner’s daily relationship quality. Effects in parentheses illustrate the direct effect after controlling for the mediator. All actor and partner predictors (i.e., sexual communal strength and perceived partner responsiveness) are controlled. See Online Supplement E for full APIM model. Asterisks indicate significant paths.

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

mediation tests between-person differences. The Monte Carlo Method for Assessing Mediation (MCMAM) was used to generate a 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect—a null hypothesis of no mediation (when the indirect effect is equal to zero) was rejected when zero fell outside of the confidence interval (Selig & Preacher, 2008). See Online Supplement D for zero-order correlations among all variables.

The pattern of results was the same for daily relationship satisfaction and commitment; so for simplicity of reporting the results, we combined these outcomes to form a composite of daily relationship quality ($\alpha = .94$). Compared to people lower in sexual communal strength, people higher in sexual communal strength had partners who indicated greater relationship quality on their daily report, $b = .31$, $t(46.70) = 2.72$, $p < .01$, even after controlling for partner’s level of sexual communal strength which was significantly associated with their daily relationship quality. $b = .43$, $t(44.91) = 3.77$, $p < .001$.

Next, we tested the prediction that perceived partner sexual responsiveness would mediate the association between sexual communal strength and the partner’s reports of relationship quality. As expected and shown in Figure 3, actors higher in sexual communal strength had partners who felt that actors were more responsive to their sexual needs, $b = .51$, $t(42.76) = 2.52$, $p = .02$. Further, partners who felt that actors were more responsive to their sexual needs over the course of the diary study reported higher relationship quality, $b = .32$, $t(203.93) = 6.03$, $p < .001$. Results of MCMAM analyses revealed that partner’s perceptions of actor sexual responsiveness (averaged over the diary) mediated the association between an actor’s sexual communal strength and their partner’s relationship quality (indirect effect CI 95% [.03, .24]; direct effect = .07, $p = .52$). That is, since this analysis tests between-person differences, as recommended by Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009), the results indicate that individuals with higher in sexual communal strength had partners who tended to have higher relationship quality over the

course of the diary and that this association is accounted for by individual differences in how sexually responsive they were, as perceived by their partners. For an explanation of the full APIM mediation model, see Online Supplement E.

To bolster our confidence in the direction of our effects in Study 2, we conducted lagged day analyses to examine the link between the mediator (i.e., perceived partner sexual responsiveness) and the outcome variables (i.e., relationship satisfaction and commitment). These analyses examine within-person variables, and ask: did participants experience greater relationship satisfaction on days when they perceived greater sexual responsiveness by their partners, compared to days when they perceived lower sexual responsiveness? We created lagged variables of relationship satisfaction and commitment (see Online Supplement F). Consistent with our theoretical model, compared to other days, participants experienced higher relationship satisfaction when, on the previous day, they reported their romantic partner was more sexually responsive than other days, even when controlling for their previous day's relationship satisfaction, $b = .13$, $t(182.88) = 1.96$, $p = .05$. A similar analysis with feelings of commitment was not statistically significant ($b = .01$, $p > .05$). These analyses suggest that perceiving a partner as more responsive to one's sexual needs is linked to increases in relationship satisfaction from one day to the next. Because perceived partner responsiveness was only assessed on days when participants reported engaging in sex, we were not able to test equivalent models for the reverse direction (see Online Supplement G).

In our final set of analyses, we sought to rule out several potential alternative explanations for our effects. First, we reran the analyses controlling for actor's relationship quality to rule out the possibility that our effects are driven by actor's reports of relationship quality as opposed to sexual communal strength. In this study, although actor and partner's daily relationship quality were significant correlated ($r = .67$ and $.27$, respectively, for relationship satisfaction and commitment), all of the effects of actor sexual communal strength on partner relationship quality remained significant when controlling for actor relationship quality. Next, we tested whether our effects remained significant after controlling for general communal strength. As in Study 1, sexual communal strength was significantly correlated with communal strength ($r = .59$, $p < .001$), but the effects remained significant after controlling for communal strength. Next, we tested whether our findings were moderated by gender, sexual frequency, relationship duration, or the presence of children in the home. Men ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .53$) reported higher sexual communal strength than women, $M = 2.83$, $SD = .47$; $t(86) = 3.32$, $p < .001$. However, gender did not significantly moderate any of our effects. Sexual frequency, relationship duration and having children were not significantly correlated with sexual communal strength and did not moderate any of the reported effects.

General Discussion

In two samples of dating and married couples from the community, we found that people feel more satisfied with and

committed to their relationships when they have partners who are motivated to meet their sexual needs. In Study 1, we demonstrated that the people higher in sexual communal strength had partners who felt more satisfied and committed both at the present time and 3 weeks later. In this study, however, the effects did not remain significant above and beyond the effects of a person's own relationship quality. It is possible that this is due to the high correlation between partners' reports of relationship quality, but these analyses did not allow us to rule out the possibility that the greater relationship quality of the partners of people high in sexual communal strength is driven by actor relationship quality. In Study 2, however, a 21-day dyadic daily experience study, we demonstrated support for actor's sexual communal strength predicting their partner's relationship quality above and beyond their actor's own reports of relationship quality. We also showed that perceived partner sexual responsiveness is one mechanism that links one partner's sexual communal strength to the other partner's relationship quality.

A Communal Approach to Sexual Relationships

The current findings demonstrate the utility of applying theories of communal motivation to the sexual domain of relationships (see also Muise et al., 2013). Individual differences in sexual communal strength predicted the quality of ongoing romantic relationships above and beyond communal motivation more generally. Although sexual communal strength and communal strength are overlapping to a certain extent, communal motivation in the specific domain of sexuality was a unique predictor of the quality of intimate bonds. This special role of sexuality may have to do with the fact that discussions about sexuality can make partners feel particularly vulnerable (Metts & Cupach, 1989; Sanford, 2003), and, since the majority of romantic relationships are sexually monogamous (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004), partners often cannot get their sexual needs met outside of a relationship like they may be able to with other needs. Being high in sexual communal strength may promote resiliency to these challenges in a particularly meaningful and vulnerable domain of relationships.

Perceived Partner Sexual Responsiveness

The current findings also highlight the utility of applying theories of perceived partner responsiveness to the domain of sexuality. In research with previously unacquainted dyads, ratings of an interaction partner's responsiveness were associated with increased desire to have sex with that person (Birnbaum & Reis, 2012). The current study, however, is the first in the literature to obtain ratings of a partner's responsiveness *during sex in established relationships*. Our finding that people felt more satisfied and committed when they perceived that their partner was more responsive to their sexual needs supports previous work by Gable et al. (2012), which suggests that perceived support may be the most beneficial for positive events in relationships.

Future Directions

The current findings suggest several directions for future research. First, future research could consider the cues that people use to detect their partner's sexual responsiveness. Some of the cues that are important in nonsexual interactions such as reassurance, encouragement, and expressions of love (Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008) may also be relevant in a sexual context. Additional cues, such as physical movements and responsiveness to a partner's touch, may be uniquely important in sexual interactions.

Second, given the benefits of sexual communal strength (see also Muise et al., 2013), an important direction for future research is to investigate the factors that promote sexual communal strength. A recent study indicated that people who communicate, either verbally or nonverbally, with their partner during sex reported higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Babin, 2012). As such, one way to promote sexual communal strength in an ongoing relationship may be to openly communicate with a partner about one's own sexual preferences.

Finally, we consider situations in which our findings are most likely to replicate. The current findings should replicate in samples of couples in established relationships, but it is not clear whether the findings would replicate in the context of causal sex relationships. In our current and previous work (Muise et al., 2013), we have provided construct validity for our measure of sexual communal strength. As such, our findings should replicate using this measure and the measures of relationship quality used in this study (Fletcher et al., 2000; Rusbult et al., 1998), as well as with other, similar measures (i.e., the dyadic adjustment scale; Spanier, 1976). What we currently do not know is whether the current findings will replicate in a sample of people who have experienced sexual coercion. Although some research suggests that sexual compliance is associated with higher relationship quality (e.g., Impett & Peplau, 2003), other research has found that sexually compliant individuals report decreased relationship satisfaction (Katz & Tirone, 2009) and that sexually compliant women are more likely to have coercive partners than less compliant women (Katz & Tirone, 2010). We also do not know whether the current findings would replicate for those who are focused on meeting their partner's needs to the exclusion of their own needs, such as those high in unmitigated communion (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Prioritizing a partner's sexual needs without considering one's own needs could lead to detrimental consequences, such as losing sight of one's own desires (Tolman, 2002) or experiencing lower sexual well-being (Muise, Preyde, Maitland, & Milhausen, 2008).

Conclusion

In ongoing relationships, romantic partners play a key role in fulfilling each other's sexual desires. Taken together, the findings from these two studies suggest that people who are both giving and game in the bedroom tend to have romantic partners

who recognize these efforts, feel satisfied, and are committed to making their relationships last.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Supplemental Material

The online data supplements are available at <http://spps.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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