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**Close Relationships and Self-Regulation:  
How Relationship Satisfaction Facilitates Momentary Goal Pursuit**

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### Abstract

In the new millennium, scholars have built a robust intersection between close relationships research and self-regulation research. However, virtually no work has investigated how the most basic and broad indicator of relationship quality, relationship satisfaction, affects self-regulation and vice versa. In the present research, we show that higher relationship satisfaction promotes a motivational mindset that is conducive for effective self-regulation, and thus for goal progress and performance. In Study 1, a large-scale, intensive experience sampling project of 115 couples (total  $N=230$ ), we closely tracked fluctuations in state relationship satisfaction (SRS) and four parameters of effective self-regulation according to our conceptual model. Dyadic process analyses showed that individuals experiencing higher SRS than they typically do exhibited higher levels of (a) perceived control, (b) goal focus, (c) perceived partner support, and (d) positive affect during goal pursuit than they typically exhibit. Together, these four self-regulation-relevant variables translated into higher rates of daily progress on specific, idiographic goals. In Study 2 ( $N=195$ ), we employed a novel experimental manipulation of SRS, replicating the link between SRS and parameters of effective self-regulation. Taken together, these findings suggest that momentary increases in relationship satisfaction may benefit everyday goal pursuit through a combination of cognitive and affective mechanisms, thus further integrating relationship research with social-cognitive research on goal pursuit.

**Keywords:** Self-Regulation, Close Relationships, Relationship Satisfaction, Goal Pursuit, Experience Sampling

## **Close Relationships and Self-Regulation: How Relationship Satisfaction Facilitates Momentary Goal Pursuit**

Perhaps Shakespeare was a bit too romantic when he paid homage to the constancy of romantic sentiments: “Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks” (Sonnet 116). In everyday life, close relationships have their inevitable ups and downs. As much as people cherish the moments when they are especially happy in their romantic relationships, they must also endure moments when that happiness ebbs. In the present paper, we investigate how these momentary fluctuations in relationship satisfaction affect goal pursuit. Specifically, we seek to answer two questions. First, are relationship partners more successful in their everyday goal pursuits when their state relationship satisfaction is higher than typical for them? Second, if so, why? To answer these questions, we report findings from an intensive experience-sampling study (Study 1) and an experimental study (Study 2) that investigate the interplay of relationship satisfaction and goal pursuit.

### **Close Relationships and Goal Pursuit**

Until recently, research on close relationships overlapped negligibly with research on self-regulation. Fortunately, the new millennium has witnessed a surge in research at the intersection of these two disciplines, a surge that has strengthened both of them. This new area of research reflects the fundamental notions that (a) relationship partners shape the way people self-regulate and (b) the way people self-regulate shapes the quality of their relationships. For instance, relationship partners affect the types of goals people pursue and the resources they have to pursue those goals (e.g., Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004; Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Finkel et al., 2006; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Gable, 2006; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). Likewise, self-regulatory strategies and resources have consequences for relationships, affecting how people feel about and act toward relationship partners (e.g., Feeney, 2004; Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Karremans, Verwijmeren, Pronk, &

Reitsma, 2009). Despite these gains in understanding how a number of specific relationship and self-regulatory processes affect each other (see Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011; Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011, for reviews), this burgeoning literature has, in a very important sense, put the cart before the horse. It has addressed a range of precise but relatively narrow topics, such as the effects of significant-other priming (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003) and the effects of inefficient social coordination (Dalton, Chartrand, & Finkel, 2010; Finkel et al., 2006) on goal pursuit, while there is a surprising dearth of research examining a foundational question for this growing field of study—namely, what is the link between relationship quality and goal progress? That is, are happier partners more successful goal pursuers?

Although no research has directly examined this question, some prior findings hint at a possible effect of successful goal pursuit on relationship satisfaction. In a study of romantic partners, Vohs and colleagues (Vohs, Finkenauer, & Baumeister, 2011) found that the sum of partners' dispositional self-control predicted relationship satisfaction. That is, the more that both partners, as individuals, reported good individual resources for goal pursuit, the happier they were as romantic partners. Given the positive correlation between self-control and goal outcomes (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989), Vohs and colleagues' finding suggests that more successful goal pursuers may also be happier romantic partners. Nonetheless, no empirical research has explicitly addressed the link between goal progress and relationship satisfaction, in either causal direction.

The aim of the current research is to directly investigate this link, primarily focusing on the unexplored idea that relationship satisfaction promotes goal progress, and investigating how and why it does so. We will also examine the downstream effects of goal progress on relationship satisfaction, as we posit that the two are linked in a dynamic and reciprocal fashion, such that high relationship satisfaction facilitates everyday goal pursuit, and that this good performance feeds back to promote relationship quality.

Why would relationship satisfaction promote goal pursuit? We suggest that when people feel particularly satisfied with their romantic relationships, widely considered a central and important part of everyday life and well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), they experience a shift in their motivational mindset. Specifically, we suggest that more (vs. less) satisfied partners perceive greater control over their goals, are more focused on their goal pursuits, feel more supported, and feel more positive affect. This more positive motivational mindset, in turn, promotes goal progress. In the following section, we describe our conceptual model in more detail.

### **A Conceptual Model Linking State Relationship Satisfaction, Self-Regulatory Processes, and Goal Performance**

The primary focus of the present article is on the potential links between state relationship satisfaction (SRS) and four self-regulatory processes known to facilitate goal progress (also referred to as facilitators of self-regulation here). *Relationship satisfaction* refers to how happy one is in one's relationship (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998); it essentially functions as a global "feeling thermometer" regarding the relationship. Relationship satisfaction is the most common operationalization of relationship quality in the romantic relationships literature (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Hendrick, 1988; Levenson & Gottman, 1985), and as such, it is the ideal construct for the present purpose of exploring the link between relationship quality and goal progress. Furthermore, although no research has directly tested the effects of relationship satisfaction on self-regulatory processes, it seems quite likely that relationship quality has a profound effect on important goal outcomes. Indeed, marital quality is associated with mental and physical health (Glenn & Weaver, 1981; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001) and with job performance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Like most constructs in psychology, relationship satisfaction has a stable, dispositional component or "set point" (i.e., some people are, on average, more satisfied with their

relationship than others), as well as a state component that captures fluctuations in relationship satisfaction depending on how a given relationship is going at the present moment in time (i.e., the ups and downs around the dispositional set point) (Bradbury et al., 2000; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). To control for the myriad ways that satisfied couples may differ from unsatisfied couples, we primarily focus on state relationship satisfaction rather than individual differences in relationship satisfaction, examining the processes through which everyday ups and downs in relationship satisfaction predict goal pursuit and progress. In our model, the term *self-regulatory processes* refers to psychological and behavioral processes that are oriented toward goal pursuit, and the term *goal performance* refers to the extent to which the individual makes progress toward achieving the relevant goal.

Our guiding idea in developing this conceptual model was that high versus low SRS may be associated with a change in the motivational mindset a person occupies when pursuing daily goals and projects. We suggest that high SRS leads people to experience fewer intrusive thoughts and worries about the relationship throughout the day, which frees them to engage in a motivational mindset more promotive of goal pursuit. Without relationship worries or stress, they can focus on their goals, feel more positive affect, make more positive attributions about their partner, and feel a greater sense of control over their goals. This change in motivational mindset would translate into changes in actual self-regulatory success at the end of the day. Specifically, the model encompasses four key parameters of effective self-regulation—four self-regulatory processes—that have each been identified as facilitators of goal pursuit in the self-regulation and relationships literatures: perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect (see Figure 1). Although the proposed four-component model is unlikely to be exhaustive, it presents a broad yet parsimonious attempt to investigate the cognitive, social, and emotional implications of high versus low SRS for goal pursuit and performance. Our primary prediction is that experiencing higher-than-typical relationship

satisfaction promotes this goal-facilitating mindset, leading to a temporary increase in perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. Our secondary prediction is that this mindset, in turn, will predict ultimate goal progress. Finally, our tertiary prediction is that goal progress will feed back to promote relationship satisfaction over time. In the following section, we outline this framework in more detail. We introduce each component by first highlighting why we hypothesize that it is conducive for goal performance (i.e., the second part of each mediation pathway), before proposing why the component may be linked to fluctuations in SRS (i.e., the first part of each mediation pathway).

*Perceived control.* The first self-regulatory process in our model, perceived control, refers to the extent to which the goal-pursuer feels in control of his or her goal performance (Rotter, 1966). According to recent psychological theories of control (for reviews, see Kay, Landau, & Sullivan, 2014; Landau, Kay, & Whitson, in press) for people to engage in goal-directed action, they need to perceive (a) a sense of control over their own actions, and (b) a structured world in which actions produce predictable outcomes. Together, these two perceptions allow people to feel in control of their own ability to attain desired outcomes (Landau et al., 2014). For example, in order to feel motivated to work hard at their jobs, people need to believe they personally have the capacity to work hard, and that they work for a company in which hard work reliably produces the predicted outcomes. Indeed, perceived control is a robust predictor of self-regulatory success. For instance, people who experience strong (vs. weak) perceived control tend to achieve greater academic success (Findley & Cooper, 1983) and lower rates of obesity (Gale, Batty, & Deary, 2008).

Why would relationship satisfaction affect perceived control? We suggest that high SRS signals stability and predictability. Research has shown that the stability of one's social world is essential for feelings of perceived control (Rothschild, Landau, Sullivan, & Keefer, 2012; Sullivan, Landau, & Rothschild, 2010), and furthermore, that relationships are a major

source of psychological stability (Day, Kay, Holmes, & Napier, 2011). For example, in one study, people responded to threats to societal stability by drawing closer to their relationship partners (Day et al., 2011), turning to them to increase their feelings of stability.

Thus, we suggest that relationship dissatisfaction challenges people's sense of stability and predictability, which undermines goal pursuit. When people feel unsure of what this important life domain will look like tomorrow, because of relationship conflicts or anxieties, they will feel a reduced sense of control over their own plans. At the extreme end, how can someone plan his specific everyday goal pursuits when his relationship is up in the air? In contrast, when relationships are going smoothly, everyday life is much more stable and predictable, allowing people to feel a greater sense of control over their goals, and increasing their willingness to invest effort into goals. As a result of these dynamics, we predicted that higher-than-typical SRS would be associated with an increase in perceived control in goal pursuit.

*Goal focus.* The second self-regulatory process, goal focus, refers to the extent to which the goal-pursuer's current thinking and behavior are oriented toward the target goal, versus other distracting or competing goals (Shah, Friedman, & Kruglanski, 2002). This component is closely related to *goal-shielding*, the ability to keep a goal in working memory and shield it from interference from other goals (Hofmann, Schmeichel, & Baddeley, 2012; Kane, Bleckley, Conway, & Engle, 2001). When individuals can shield a current goal well, focusing on advancing the target goal through their thought and action, rather than allowing their action to be distracted and diluted by the pursuit of competing goals and temptations, they are able to invest more self-regulatory resources in the pursuit of the current goal and/or to use these resources more efficiently. In everyday goal pursuit, goal focus means that the pursuer is engaged in thought or action related to the target goal. For example, a professor who is high in goal focus at a given moment is thinking intently about her manuscript, not checking e-mail or



reading the New York Times online. As a result of the tighter link between goals, thought, and action, goal focus facilitates progress on the target goal. Indeed, the ability to shield goals well from interference predicts better goal performance and progress across a large number of settings, including everyday academic and health goal pursuits (Barrett, Tugade, & Engle, 2004; Hofmann, Gschwendner, Friese, Wiers, & Schmitt, 2008; Hofmann et al., 2012).

Thus, in our model, goal focus predicts good goal outcomes. Why would relationship satisfaction affect goal focus? We suggest that when people feel satisfied with their relationships, they will experience fewer worries and less anxiety about the relationship, leaving their mind relatively more able to concentrate on the goal at hand. Indeed, poor relationship quality and relationship problems predict rumination and intrusive thoughts (Burnette, Davis, Green, Worthington, & Bradfield, 2009; Kuehner & Bueger, 2005; Saffrey & Ehrenberg, 2007). Furthermore, a wide body of research has demonstrated that distressing thoughts occupy working memory, thus reducing the capacity available for goal pursuit (Kemps, Tiggemann, & Grigg, 2008; Klein & Boals, 2001; Schmader & Johns, 2003; Schoofs, Preuss, & Wolf, 2008). Although working memory capacity is not synonymous with goal focus, it is clearly a requirement for goal focus. If an employee's mind is occupied by worries and thoughts of his romantic relationship partner, he cannot easily focus his thought and action on the target goal of working. Instead, he is likelier to become distracted or to struggle to concentrate. In contrast, a relationship that is going well is less likely to generate intrusive thoughts or pull the mind away from goal-directed action. Thus, because relationship worries can produce rumination and intrusive thoughts, we predict that low SRS will decrease goal focus, relative to high SRS.

*Perceived Partner Support.* The third self-regulatory process, perceived partner support, refers to the extent to which individuals perceive that their relationship partners facilitate their goal pursuit (Brunstein et al., 1996). Although perceived control—that is, an

internal locus of control—is a key ingredient for successful self-regulation, this does not mean that the external social environment plays no role, nor that perceptions of internal and external predictors of goal progress should be negatively related. For instance, research on the dependency paradox in close relationships has shown that relying on others in the pursuit of one's goals does not interfere with one's sense of autonomy and control (Feeney, 2007). Indeed, internal and external sources of control can both contribute to the functional belief that things are under control (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008) and can thus facilitate goal pursuit (Kay, Whitson, Gaucher, & Galinsky, 2009). A major source of external control over goal pursuit comes from close relationship partners, who can help and support just as they can also stand in the way of each other's goals. Across many domains of life, support from helpful partners has consistently been linked with more successful goal pursuit (DiMatteo, 2004; Reblin & Uchino, 2008). Importantly, however, the effects of the social environment need not correspond to literal—in the sense of “physical” or objective—helping or hindering. Rather, research in the social support tradition has highlighted the importance of the *perceived* sense of social support in motivating people to reach their goals (Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007). Although actual and perceived support are clearly related, objective provision of support only accounts for a relatively small share of the variance in perceptions of received social support, attesting to the highly subjective nature of social support (Cutrona, 1986; Haber et al., 2007). In the context of close relationships, the perceived support of a romantic partner arguably constitutes the most central source of social support or control (with the exception, perhaps, of nagging mothers). Accordingly, people who perceive that their partner strongly (vs. weakly) supports their goal pursuits tend to experience superior goal performance (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Feeney, 2004).

Why would relationship satisfaction affect perceptions of partner support? Because of the subjective nature of perceptions of social support, they are vulnerable to the influence of

other interpersonal beliefs, perceptions, and motivations. It is well known that satisfaction predicts positive illusions in romantic relationships: Members of happy relationships are likely to overestimate the positive qualities of their partners and the extent to which they and their partners have a good relationship, relative to others (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

Satisfied partners also make more positive and generous attributions about their relationships and partners (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987, 1993). Based on this work, we thus predicted that high as compared to low SRS would be associated with more optimistic perceptions about the degree to which one's partner supports the pursuit of a given goal.

*Positive Affect.* The fourth and final self-regulatory process in our conceptual model, *positive affect*, refers to the extent to which the goal-pursuer experiences positive affect while pursuing the goal. Although the link between positive affect and goal performance is complex (Fishbach & Labroo, 2007; Louro, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2007), several researchers have argued that positive affect may, by and large, be conducive for success in everyday life (e.g., Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Specifically, positive affect may lead people to think, feel, and act in ways that promote approaching desired end states (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2001). Incidental positive affect signals that life is going well, and that resources are adequate (Clore, Wyer, Dienes, Gasper, & Isbell, 2001), thus preparing people to pursue current or future challenges (Fredrickson, 2001). Similarly, positive affect can (implicitly) motivate people to act upon their goal intentions (Custers & Aarts, 2005; Kuhl, 2000), thus helping to reduce the intention-behavior gap. Furthermore, sources of positive affect can compensate against frustration and resource depletion as the going gets tough (Tice, Baumeister, Shmueli, & Muraven, 2007). In sum, we hypothesized that positive affect would promote goal pursuit.

Why would relationship satisfaction promote positive affect? We made the straightforward assumption that SRS would be a major source of positive affect. Happy,

satisfied times in a relationship are likely to produce more positive feelings than unhappy, dissatisfied times, for two simple reasons: Without intrusive thoughts and worries about the relationship, people can more strongly enjoy their day-to-day activities; presumably SRS also brings along with it happy emotions directly caused by being with the partner. Indeed, marital dissatisfaction is thought to predict depressive symptoms and lower life satisfaction (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Glenn & Weaver, 1981). We assessed positive affect (operationalized as momentary levels of happiness) to capture and isolate the purely affective dimension of higher-than-typical SRS. Thus, any mediating effects of the above three components would indicate mechanisms that go beyond the purely emotional implications of higher-than-typical SRS.

### **The Present Research**

In summary, the present research sought to investigate the idea that experiencing higher-than-typical relationship satisfaction is associated with a motivational mindset that facilitates goal pursuit through a combination of four separable mechanisms: an increased sense of control over the pursuit of one's goals, an increased ability to focus without distraction on that pursuit, an increased perception that the partner supports the pursuit, and increased positive affect. In combination, we predicted that these four mechanisms would at least partially mediate the effect of SRS on goal progress.

Rather than assessing all relevant constructs once in a cross-sectional fashion, we chose a more sophisticated, process-oriented approach to test our conceptual model in Study 1. We repeatedly captured fluctuations in SRS in romantic partners as they went about their daily lives, pursuing their everyday goals. We employed an intensive experience-sampling procedure in which we texted both members of 115 couples (total  $N = 230$ ) at six random moments through each day for one week (42 text signals per partner in total). Each text signal contained a link to a brief survey that assessed relationship satisfaction and the relevant self-

regulatory processes regarding the goal the participant was actively pursuing at that moment. This procedure allowed us to investigate whether within-person fluctuations in relationship satisfaction were associated with within-person variation in our four central self-regulatory processes. In addition, every night, participants reported, on a goal-by-goal basis, their progress and performance on each of the goals they had reported pursuing throughout that day (up to six reports on each nightly diary). This aspect of our design allowed us to test whether fluctuations in SRS translated into higher self-regulatory success throughout the day. Further, we assessed the generality of our findings by testing whether the links between SRS and the four self-regulatory processes were moderated by goal type (personal goals versus relationship goals) or relationship duration.

In addition to the main analyses looking at the short-term effects of relationship satisfaction on self-regulatory processes and goal progress, we also assessed relationship satisfaction at the global (i.e., person-) level both at study intake and at the conclusion of the week-long experience-sampling phase. These assessments allowed us to test whether overall goal progress during the sampling week predicted increases in relationship satisfaction over time, providing the first test of the downstream effect of self-regulatory success and failure on relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, to discern whether results are driven primarily by the relevant goal pursuer A's own, subjective interpretation of the affective tenor of the relationship rather than his or her partner B's interpretation, we also complemented our primary data analyses in Study 1 with actor-partner interdependence modelling (APIM). We predicted that the actor effects would be robust but the partner effects would not. Such a finding would indicate that partner B influences partner A's self-regulatory success only indirectly inasmuch he or she influenced A's level of SRS.

Study 1's approach utilizes a powerful within-person process framework to explore the proposed links between SRS and parameters of effective self-regulation in an ecologically

valid setting. However, such evidence is still only correlational in nature, thus precluding any causal claims as to the direction of these effects. To establish causal evidence for the proposed mechanisms, we therefore employed an experimental manipulation of SRS in Study 2, assessing the relevant self-regulatory processes immediately thereafter. By combining a measurement-intensive, externally valid approach in Study 1 with an experimental, internally valid design in Study 2, these studies allow for a multimethod test of the idea that high relationship satisfaction is associated with processes that facilitate goal pursuit and progress.

### **Study 1: Experience Sampling**

The present study recruited 115 heterosexual couples from the greater Chicago area to participate in what we called the “RELGOES” project, a week-long study on RELationships and GOal pursuits using Experience Sampling. Experience sampling is an expensive and labor-intensive method that allows researchers to learn about what people are doing, thinking, and feeling at moments in their lives (e.g., Barrett & Barrett, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi & Larsen, 1987; Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). Signals were distributed randomly throughout the day on participants’ own smartphones, but the two partners within a relationship received simultaneous signals (providing us with the analytical leverage to model covariation in residuals as well as to conduct APIM analyses). Each time a signal was received, participants were asked to pause their current activity and report on the primary goal they were currently trying to accomplish, as well as on the four key self-regulatory parameters related to the goal (locus of control, goal focus, perceived partner support) and their own current state (relationship satisfaction, positive affect). This experience sampling procedure was combined with a daily diary procedure in which participants were asked to complete one nightly assessment regarding their perceived progress and performance regarding each of the goals mentioned during the day (as well as measures such as sleep quality, and whether they had had an argument or were sexually intimate with their partner on that day).

The experience sampling phase was preceded by an orientation meeting during which demographic and relationship-related variables such as relationship-duration and dispositional relationship satisfaction were assessed (pretest). Two days after the experience sampling phase was finished, these measures were assessed again (posttest). To our knowledge, this is the first study that has used experience sampling methods to collect a high-resolution dataset of everyday goal pursuit as well as fluctuations in state relationship satisfaction in dyads. In addition, the study produced novel information on the types of goals people pursued as well as on the degree to which a construct such as relationship satisfaction fluctuates within partners. Because these data may be of interest to self-regulation and relationships researchers, we will briefly feature these descriptive data at the beginning of the results section.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Two hundred and thirty participants forming 115 heterosexual couples were recruited for this study through advertising in local newspapers in the greater Chicago area. Recruitment advertisements pointed to an online screening survey for the study. Couples were only recruited if both partners indicated they were in an exclusive romantic relationship and if they had been together for at least three months; in addition they both needed to be older than 18 years of age, proficient in English, and in possession of a smartphone including a touchscreen, texting capability, and a data plan.

On average, male partners were 24.68 years old ( $SD = 5.06$ ; range 18 to 40), and female partners were 23.37 years old ( $SD = 4.46$ ; range 18 to 40). Participants had been involved with each other for an average of 2.61 years ( $SD = 2.83$ ). Forty-seven percent of couples were cohabiting at the time of the study. The sample reflected the ethnic diversity of the area—53.9% of participants were Caucasian, 16.1% were African American, 16.1% Hispanic/Latino, 12.2% Asian, 0.9% American Indian, and 0.9% were of other backgrounds.

Regarding the highest level of education, 0.9% indicated “some high school,” 4.4% “completed high school,” 49.8% “some college,” 26.6% “completed college,” and 18.3% “advanced/post-graduate studies.” In terms of social class, 2.6% identified themselves with the lower class, 35.7% with the working class, 42.2% with the middle class, 17.8% with the upper-middle class, and 1.7% with the upper class.

Regarding smartphone operating systems, 56.5% of participants used smartphones running Apple’s iOS (i.e., iPhone), 39.1% Android, 3.0% Blackberry RIM, and 1.3% Windows Mobile. All 230 participants completed the pretest assessment. Six participants had to drop out of the mobile phase due to technical problems with their smartphone that could not be solved quickly. Hence, the experience sampling data for daily signals are limited to a maximum base sample of 224 participants (49.1% male) from 115 dyads. Ten additional participants did not provide any nightly diary responses; hence analyses involving summary measures are limited to a maximum of 214 participants (from 111 dyads). That is, 97.4% of participants provided data relevant to the experience sampling procedures, and 93.0% provided data relevant to the nightly diary procedures. As number of dyads and participants varied from analysis to analysis depending on data availability, this information will be provided in table notes.

## **Procedure**

**Intake Session.** Both partners of a given couple attended the laboratory-based intake session together. At this session, the experimenter informed them about the general purpose of the study and provided both oral and written instructions regarding the mobile phase of the study, including a survey demonstration on each participant’s own smartphone. Specifically, participants were informed that they were to respond to the surveys only when it was safe to do so (e.g., not while driving), to maximize the time during the day when they were available to respond to surveys, to respond as soon as possible, to report the experience at the moment the signal was received, to answer as truthfully as possible, and to not discuss any aspect of the



study (except coordinating logistics) with their partner until the entire study had concluded. They were also informed about data confidentiality and compensation, and offered informed consent. Participants then enrolled their phone in the mobile phase of the survey via a web-application.<sup>1</sup> After SMS (text-messaging) reception and mobile survey display had been tested on each participant's smartphone, participants completed a short survey assessing demographic and relationship-related variables. Of interest for our tertiary hypothesis is the relationship satisfaction scale by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998), a 5-item global measure of relationship satisfaction (e.g., "I feel satisfied with our relationship";  $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Mobile Phase.** The Web application controlled all aspects of the smartphone experience-sampling phase including signup, the scheduling of signals as text messages to participants' smartphones, link timeout, and the registration of responses. Specifically, on each day of a participant's experience sampling schedule, six daily signals were distributed throughout the 11-hour time window from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Following recommendations of Hektner, Schmidt, and Csikszentmihalyi (2009), this time window was divided into six blocks of 110 minutes each; within each block, an exact signal time was randomly selected with the proviso that any two consecutive signals be at least 30 minutes apart. Daily signals within each dyad were yoked such that both partners received signals simultaneously. Embedded in each text message was an individualized link directing participants to an online survey created and optimized for mobile display within Qualtrics survey software. Specifically, the link contained embedded information on the schedule day, signal number, send time, as well as a recipient identifier that allowed us to connect a given participant's reports on each experience sampling survey with its relevant nightly diary questionnaire. The nightly diary links were dispatched at 9 p.m. each day.

Each survey link was valid for a maximum duration of three hours. However, participants were encouraged during the orientation session to respond as soon as possible to

signals and to try their best to minimize the number of times they needed to delay responding. The median delay in responding was 11.7 minutes. Given that many signals surely arrived when participants were in a meeting, in class, at a movie, or otherwise indisposed—which would cause them to have a delayed response, such a short median lag time is remarkable. On average, the base sample ( $N = 224$ ) responded to 30.2 out of 42 daily signals ( $SD = 9.46$ ), indicating a satisfactory response rate of 71.8%, and they responded to 5.6 out of 7 nightly signals ( $SD = 1.97$ ), indicating a satisfactory response rate of 79.4%. Of surveys that participants started, they completed 97.9%. To make full use of the available data, we also included partial responses in analyses.

Participants were reimbursed with \$30 as a base compensation. As additional incentives, they received an additional \$30 if they completed both (a) at least 35 out of the total of 49 daily and nightly questionnaires and (b) the posttest survey.

### **Experience sampling protocol**

**Daily Signals.** The experience sampling protocol for the daily signals consisted of three sections. The first section on goal pursuit began with the starter question: “Please tell us about your current situation: Are you trying to accomplish something right now?” We emphasized that “this could be something you are trying to get started, complete, attain, achieve, or master, but it could also be something you are trying not to do, trying to avoid, or trying to resist from doing.” If participants indicated “No”, the survey was branched to the second section. If they indicated “Yes”, we asked them to describe, in as few words as possible, what they were trying to accomplish. In this section, participants also categorized the goal content along the taxonomy of goal domains we developed, checking one or more of these 13 options: relationship with partner, social (other than partner), academic/professional, health/fitness, financial, pleasure/enjoyment, leisure, hobby, spiritual/religious, charity/activism, emotion management, maintenance (e.g., grocery shopping, grooming), and other. They then provided

information on *perceived control* (“How much do you feel in control over this ([goal])?”) on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*), and also completed a measure of the perceived likelihood of goal attainment (“How likely do you think you are to accomplish this ([goal])?”). We assessed *goal focus* by first asking people to jot down what exactly they were doing when they received the signal and to then asking them to indicate on a seven-point scale the extent to which that activity was harmful (–3) or helpful (+3) for the goal they wanted to accomplish. Thus, higher values indicate more goal focus. Perceived partner support was assessed by first asking participants to what extent the partner knew about the present goal on a scale from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*). If they indicated at least minimal partner knowledge (i.e., a value of 1 or higher), participants indicated on a scale from –3 (*a lot more difficult*) to +3 (*a lot easier*) how much their partner makes it easier or more difficult to accomplish the goal (*perceived partner support*). In the absence of partner knowledge (i.e., a value of 0), we asked a hypothetical question instead (“If your partner knew about this, how much do you think your partner would make it easier or more difficult for you to accomplish this ([goal])?”). Participants also indicated whether their partner was present/close nearby at the moment or not. SRS was assessed by asking participants how satisfied they were with their relationship partner at the moment on a scale from –3 (*very dissatisfied*) to +3 (*very satisfied*). Finally, we assessed *positive affect* (“How happy do you feel at the moment?”; –3 to +3) and assessed further situational boundary conditions that were not relevant to the present article (e.g., alcohol intoxication, stress).

**Nightly Diary.** On each nightly diary, participants completed measures assessing the progress and performance of *each* goal they had reported pursuing that day—up to six distinct goals (the maximum possible, given they received six signals). The order of assessment was the chronological order with which goals had been listed throughout the day. For each cycle of assessment, participants were provided with their own verbatim description of the goal before

indicating whether they successfully completed it. If “no” was selected, they indicated how much progress they made with what they were trying to accomplish on a scale from 0 to 6. If “yes” was selected the progress item was logically skipped and the progress value was automatically set to the maximum value (6).

**Posttest Survey.** Two days after the experience-sampling phase was finished, participants were invited to complete a brief online survey assessing several relationship-related variables. Of interest for the present work, they again completed the global relationship satisfaction scale (Rusbult et al., 1998;  $\alpha = .90$ ). Pre- and posttest scale scores were correlated at  $r = .63$ .

### **Analytic Procedures and Strategy**

**Data Aggregation.** Prior to analyses, we inspected the pattern of correlations among related constructs to detect whether aggregate measures could be combined into broad constructs. We had anticipated that control and attainment likelihood might be positively related. However, the correlation was lower than we had expected,  $r = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ , and because attainment likelihood is not a face valid measure of perceived control, we did not combine the two measures into an aggregate measure. Instead, we used the perceived control item as the sole item measuring control (sensitivity analyses showed that conclusions regarding perceived control remain largely identical when the two measures are combined). Goal progress and performance satisfaction from the nightly diary were substantially related,  $r = .49$ ,  $p < .001$ ; hence, we decided to form a composite goal performance index for each goal reported earlier that day.

**Dyadic Process Analyses.** Because experience sampling data are nested, all analyses—except descriptive raw data calculations—were conducted as (multilevel) *dyadic process analyses* (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013) using the SAS PROC MIXED procedure. The analysis of repeated dyadic data is more complex than the standard multilevel case. First,

although there are three conceptual levels of analysis (occasions nested within partners nested within dyads), such a model is “saturated” at the middle level of analysis in the case of distinguishable dyad members: Once the role within the dyad (e.g., male vs. female) is included as a dummy variable in the statistical model, there can be no estimate of additional variability at the middle level (Diggle, Heagarty, Liang, & Zeger, 2002; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Second, repeated dyadic data can be characterized by two distinct sources of nonindependence of the level-1 residuals (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Bolger & Shrout, 2007). One source of dependency of residuals is given by autoregressive dependencies within dyad members over time (e.g., partner A’s relationship satisfaction measured at time  $t_1$  is likely to be correlated with partner A’s relationship satisfaction measured at time  $t_2$ ). Given the parallel nature of our experience sampling assessment, the second source of dependency of residuals is the likely assumption that there will be (within-couple) covariation between partner A’s and B’s responses at a given measurement occasion (e.g., partner A’s relationship satisfaction measured at time  $t_1$  is likely to be correlated with partner B’s relationship satisfaction measured at time  $t_1$ ).

We therefore analyzed these data using a multilevel model for repeated dyadic data that treats the three-level nested structure (measurement occasions nested within persons nested within dyads) as if it has a two level nested structure, accounting for the third level by including a dummy-variable to estimate male and female effects separately (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013; Raudenbush, Brennan, & Barnett, 1995). Level 1 represents variability due to within-person repeated measures for male and female partners separately, and Level 2 represents between-couple variability across male partners and across female partners (for more details, see Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005; Raudenbush et al., 1995). Level 1 variables such as SRS vary both within-persons (i.e., it can fluctuate from measurement occasion to measurement occasion) and between-persons (i.e., people differ from each other in their

average, aggregated relationship satisfaction). Because we wished to focus on contextual within-person processes (e.g., how do fluctuations in relationship satisfaction affect variation in a given self-regulatory process?), we isolated the within-subjects variability of interest through person-mean centering (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). As recommended by Bolger and Laurenceau (2013), the statistically independent grand-mean centered average effects of experience sampling predictor variables were routinely entered into the model (as a Level 2 predictor). These are provided in tables for the interested reader, but they will not be discussed in detail due to our focus on within-participant processes. Also, because the focus of the present research was on general effects rather than gender differences, we estimated the average effects across the two genders with the ESTIMATE command, and we tested whether multilevel regression parameters differed reliably between genders using the CONTRAST command (denoted as “Gender Moderation” in the results section). Except in the rare case of statistical significant gender differences, we discuss results based on the overall effects. For the sake of completeness, we report all gender-specific estimates in our main tables.

To account for the two types of dependencies in residuals outlined above, we specified the complex Level-1 error covariance structure using the TYPE=un@ar(1) option on the REPEATED statement of the PROC MIXED procedure. The ar(1) part estimates a first-order autoregressive structure within dyad members over measurement occasions (denoted as “Autocorrelation” in tables), whereas the UN part allows for the simultaneous estimation of between-dyad-members dependencies at a given measurement occasion (denoted as “M-F Residual covariance” in tables).

Except for the random intercepts, all other model effects were estimated as fixed effects due to reasons of model complexity. We acknowledge that this is a limitation of our analytic approach, because it is quite likely that there is random variation in these slopes across participants in everyday life. Unfortunately, a considerable portion of the models did not

converge when estimating random slope effects, particularly when multiple predictors were used. Further, to account for possible variation across days and deal with the non-independence of signals from the same day, we routinely included day of the week as a fixed effect through a set of (six) effects-coded variables in all dyadic-process models.<sup>2</sup> Including day had very little effect on parameter estimates and model fit and did not affect any of our statistical conclusions. We also investigated the impact of controlling for possible goal domain differences in outcomes by including goal domain as a set of dummy-coded variables. The effects of controlling for goal domain were negligible, and controlling for goal domain did not affect any of our statistical conclusions. For the sake of model parsimony, we report analyses collapsing across goal domains.

## Results

### Descriptive Findings

**Goals.** Overall, participants indicated a current goal on 4,587 (68%) out of the 6,756 total number of signals responded to, confirming that goal pursuit is a frequent feature of daily life. In terms of goal domains, Figure 2 shows how frequently men and women assigned the goals they pursued to the 13 broad domains (percentages add up to more than 100% because participants could indicate multiple goal domains as being served by each current goal). The single most frequently mentioned goal domain was academic/work-related, followed by pleasure-related goals. Relationship goals were the third most frequently mentioned goal, with about 25% of current goals serving relationship interests, followed by financial goals, leisure goals, social goals, maintenance goals, and health/fitness-related goals. As is clear in Figure 2, men and women were quite similar in domains toward which their goal-pursuits were targeted; indeed, the correlation between male and female domain proportions was  $r = .97$ . Goal progress information, as collected through the nightly diary, was available for a total of 3,883 reported goals (85% of all reported goals).

**State Relationship Satisfaction.** To explore the means and distribution of SRS, we conducted a dyadic random intercept model on the 6,653 available observations on which data on SRS were provided (see Table 1; an analysis of SRS from occasions only on which a goal was reported yielded identical results). The overall intercept estimated was  $M = 2.05$  ( $SE = .07$ ) on the scale from  $-3$  to  $+3$ . The estimated male ( $M = 2.04$ ,  $SE = .08$ ) and female ( $M = 2.05$ ,  $SE = .09$ ) partner intercepts did not differ, as confirmed by a contrast test (Gender Moderation  $F = .001$ ,  $p = .971$ ).<sup>3</sup> Hence, males and females enjoyed relatively high SRS over the course of the experience sampling week. Both random intercept variances were highly significant, indicating significant intraindividual differences in average SRS (see Table 1). More important, random intercepts co-varied significantly (see Table 1; equivalent to a correlation of  $r = .36$ ), which suggests that average levels of relationship satisfaction are moderately shared between partners. Furthermore, both sources of dependency of residuals (autocorrelation over time; between-partner dependency) accounted for covariance in residuals. This confirms the notion that SRS should best be modeled as a state combining temporary carryover effects from observation to observation and shared experiences with the partner at a given point in time (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). Finally, person-level aggregated SRS was robustly correlated with the global measure of relationship satisfaction (Rusbult et al., 1998) from the intake session,  $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicating convergent validity of aggregated momentary relationship satisfaction and traditional self-reports.

The residual (level-1) variances reported in Table 1 also provide an assessment of the temporal variation of SRS over time (i.e., assessed as within-person variation around the person mean). The male and female variances correspond to standard deviations of  $SD_{\text{Male}} = .95$  and  $SD_{\text{Female}} = .99$ , respectively. Thus, even though average SRS was high, there was substantial individual-level variation over time. In addition, there was significant temporal co-variation between partners, as indicated by a significant average profile correlation of  $r = .28$ ,  $p$



< .01, between the male and female partner SRS values (for an illustration, see Supplementary Figure 1). Further supplementary analyses showed that fluctuation in SRS was significantly related to the two significant relationship events assessed (see Supplementary Table 1).

Specifically, SRS (as assessed repeatedly throughout the day) was lower on days on which a partner reported a disagreement with his or her partner,  $M = 2.19$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , as compared on days without disagreement,  $M = 1.71$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p < .001$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .891$ ).

Conversely, SRS was slightly elevated on days on which a partner reported having sexual intercourse with his or her partner,  $M = 2.22$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , as compared on days without sex,  $M = 2.04$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ . The latter effect was significantly moderated by gender,  $p < .001$ , indicating that the positive effect of sexual intercourse was larger for men ( $M = 2.26$ ) than for women ( $M = 2.17$ ).

### **SRS and Self-Regulatory Processes**

The main purpose of this article was to investigate whether and how SRS relates to effective self-regulation. To this end, we first ran a preliminary series of random intercept models on the four facilitators of self-regulation (perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, positive affect), summarized in Supplementary Table 2. In the next step, we regressed each of the four variables on SRS. As can be seen from Table 2, when participants' SRS was higher than typical for them, they indicated higher levels of perceived control over the goal in question,  $B = .16$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $SE = .02$ ; Gender Moderation  $p = .871$ ) than when their SRS was lower than typical for them. (The regression coefficient of .16 indicates that a one-unit increase on the SRS scale was associated with a .16 unit increase in perceived control.)

Higher-than-typical SRS also related to significantly higher goal focus,  $B = .13$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $SE = .03$ ; Gender Moderation  $p = .781$ ), perceived partner support,  $B = .34$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $SE = .02$ ; Gender Moderation  $p = .703$ ), and positive affect,  $B = .53$ ,  $p < .001$  ( $SE = .02$ ; Gender Moderation  $p = .315$ ). In short, this first set of analyses supports the motivational-mindset

prediction that a relationship that is going well at a given point in time facilitates cognitive and affective self-regulatory processes that can promote the pursuit of a wide variety of everyday goals.

### **Testing for Mediation: Relationship Satisfaction, Self-Regulatory Processes, and Goal Performance**

Thus far, the results have shown that fluctuations in relationship satisfaction were positively linked to fluctuations in the four facilitators of self-regulatory success—perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. Next we examined whether relationship satisfaction predicted goal performance at the end of the day and whether the four facilitators of self-regulatory success mediate such a link. A first analysis demonstrated that higher-than-typical relationship satisfaction predicted higher-than-typical goal performance,  $B = .06, p = .011$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .174$ ).<sup>4</sup> Next, as summarized in Table 3, we found that each of the four facilitators of self-regulatory success explained unique variance in goal performance. Finally, we tested whether the total effect between SRS and goal performance was significantly reduced after including the four potential mediators in the model. As summarized in Figure 3, the total effect was reduced to non-significance (and even turned negative in sign) when the four mediators were entered into the regression equation,  $B = -.03, p = .145$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .185$ ). Moreover, to test the significance of each separate indirect pathway in the mediation model, we also applied the Monte Carlo bootstrapping method for estimating the confidence intervals for each indirect pathway (Selig & Preacher, 2008). The analysis revealed that all four proposed mediators indeed yielded significant and positive mediation effects, all  $ps < .05$ ). Thus, perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect all appear to contribute to self-regulatory success through separable, independent mechanisms.

### **Moderator Analyses: Goal Type, Partner Presence, and Relationship Duration**

The above analyses establish a general connection between state fluctuations in relationship satisfaction and concurrent parameters related to effective goal pursuit that translate into better goal performance. In the next phase of analyses, we examined *when* these links would be particularly prominent by exploring the moderating effect of goal type and relationship duration.<sup>5</sup> In particular, we examined whether the association of relationship satisfaction with self-regulatory processes and goal performance was stronger or weaker for relationship-related goals than relationship-unrelated goals, for situations during which the partner was present rather than absent, and for longer- rather than shorter-term relationships. In each model, we added to the models presented in Table 2 the moderator main effect as well as the interaction between SRS and the moderator (estimated separately for males and females). As above, we also estimated the average main and interaction effects across gender with the ESTIMATE and CONTRAST functions, respectively. As none of the moderator effects was qualified by a significant gender contrast, we summarize these analyses by presenting the average main and interaction effects from these analyses (see Table 4).

To investigate whether the above general effects were more pronounced for relationship-related rather than relationship-unrelated goals (goal type), we created a dummy variable by assigning all goals for which participants tagged the *relationship* multiple-choice option to the relationship category ( $n = 1,122$ ; coded 1) and all remaining goals to the non-relationship category ( $n = 3,378$ ; coded 0).<sup>6</sup> Results showed that goal type interacted with perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect such that the link between SRS and all four mediators of goal performance was stronger for relationship goals than for non-relationship goals (see Table 4 and Supplementary Figure 2, Panels A to D). However, simple-slope analyses indicated that SRS was still reliably related to perceived control,  $B = .09, p < .001$ , goal focus,  $B = .09, p = .013$ , perceived partner support,  $B = .27, p < .001$ , and positive affect,  $B = .49, p < .001$ , for non-relationship-related goals. Of further

note, the link between SRS and goal performance at the end of the day was not reliably moderated by goal type, interaction  $B = -.02$ ,  $p = .71$ . Hence, the above associations of SRS and with self-regulation appear to hold in general, although they are somewhat more pronounced for relationship-related goals.

We also investigated how the physical presence of the partner affects self-regulation parameters. On the level of main effects, partner presence (1 = partner physically present, 35% of measurement occasions; 0 = partner physically absent, 65% of measurement occasions) was associated with lower levels of perceived control, no difference in goal focus, higher levels of perceived support and higher affective positivity (see Table 4). More important, partner presence moderated the effect of SRS on perceived support as well as affective positivity such that fluctuations in SRS had a stronger effect on perceived support as well as affective positivity when the partner was present rather than absent (Table 4 and Supplementary Figure 2, Panels E and F). Again, simple-slope analyses showed that SRS was still reliably related to perceived support,  $B = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , and affective positivity,  $B = .45$ ,  $p < .001$ , when the partner was absent. Of further note, the link between SRS and goal performance at the end of the day was not reliably moderated by partner presence, interaction  $B = -.006$ ,  $p = .898$ .

The moderator analysis involving relationship duration (in years) revealed an interaction with regard to perceived control (see Table 4), suggesting that the relationship between SRS and perceived control is more pronounced for less-established couples than for more-established couples. In a related vein, SRS and affective positivity were more strongly intertwined for couples below-average in their relationship duration, whereas relationship satisfaction and positive affect were relatively more dissociated among partners in longer-term relationships (see Table 4 and Supplementary Figure 2, Panels G and H). The link between SRS and goal performance at the end of the day was not reliably moderated by relationship duration, interaction  $B = -.007$ ,  $p = .526$ .

## **APIM Analysis: The Importance of the Subjective Experience of Relationship**

### **Satisfaction**

We conducted an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) analysis (Campbell & Kashy, 2002; Kenny et al., 2006) to explore whether goal performance is not only influenced by the SRS of the person pursuing a given goal (actor effect) as shown above, but also by the partner's SRS at that moment in time (partner effect). To this end, we added partner SRS scores to the dyadic process model above, again using dummy coding to estimate male and female partner effects. This analysis revealed that there was no SRS partner effect on goal performance,  $B = -.01$ ,  $p = .636$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .436$ ), whereas the actor effect remained robust,  $B = .05$ ,  $p = .030$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .643$ ). This pattern of results suggests that it is primarily the subjective, individual experience of relationship satisfaction of the person pursuing a given goal that predicts goal performance, rather than the (correlated but distinguishable) relationship satisfaction of one's partner.

## **Does Goal Performance throughout the Week Predict Changes in Global Relationship**

### **Satisfaction?**

Thus far, we have focused on the associations of within-person fluctuations in relationship satisfaction with within-person fluctuations in goal pursuit. To complement these analyses in light of our tertiary prediction on the positive downstream effect of goal pursuit on relationship satisfaction, we investigated whether aggregated (i.e., overall) goal performance throughout the week predicted change in global relationship satisfaction from before to after the experience-sampling phase. To this end, we used the Rusbult et al. (1998) relationship satisfaction scale, assessed at baseline (1 day before the experience sampling phase) as well as 2 days after the experience-sampling phase as a global indicator of relationship satisfaction. 213 participants had provided information on both measurement occasions. Initial analyses indicated that there was a non-significant overall trend towards somewhat higher relationship

satisfaction after the experience-sampling phase,  $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ , as compared to before,  $M = 5.81$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $t(212) = 1.83$ ,  $p = .07$ . On a descriptive level, there was non-negligible within-person change from pre- to post-test relationship satisfaction, as indicated by an average *absolute* change from pretest to posttest of .60 (on a scale from 1 to 7). To account for systematic portions of relative change, we ran a multilevel residual change analysis with distinguishable dyads, accounting for the nested data structure. Global relationship satisfaction at Time 2 was the dependent variable. As the first predictor, we entered global relationship satisfaction at Time 1,  $B = .60$ ,  $p < .001$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .322$ ). This allowed us to model residual change in relationship satisfaction, that is, above- or below-average changes in participants' relationship satisfaction than what would be expected based on initial levels. As the main predictor of interest, we entered the aggregated goal performance index for each person (i.e., averaged goal performance across all goals reported throughout the entire week). Aggregated goal performance explained significant portions of variance in relationship satisfaction residual change scores,  $B = .21$ ,  $p = .010$  (Gender Moderation  $p = .614$ ), indicating that those partners who had made relatively more progress during the observed week of goal strivings showed a relative increase in relationship satisfaction from pretest to posttest whereas those who made relatively little progress showed a relative decrease.<sup>7</sup>

## Discussion

Study 1 employed a measurement-intensive experience-sampling design to closely capture state fluctuations in relationship satisfaction in couples' natural environments and investigate how they affect the pursuit of everyday goals. Despite relatively high average levels of SRS, participants exhibited considerable fluctuation around their own mean level of satisfaction over time, reflecting the ups and downs of close relationships. Testing our primary prediction, we found that SRS is linked to a positive motivational mindset during goal pursuit, predicting four important parameters of effective self-regulation: perceived control, goal focus,

perceived partner support, and positive affect. Multiple mediation analyses testing our secondary prediction showed that each of these parameters of effective self-regulation makes an independent, traceable contribution in transmitting the predictive power of SRS on goal performance as assessed later at the end of the day. These findings not only show an effect of SRS on goal performance but also to highlight underlying key mechanisms.

Are these beneficial effects of SRS restricted to the narrower sphere of relationship goals, or do they generalize to the broader body of goals people pursue? Supplementary moderator analyses showed that the associations of SRS with the four facilitators and with goal performance held also with regard to non-relationship-related goals (albeit with somewhat smaller magnitude), attesting to the generality of the link between SRS and effective self-regulation. Furthermore, an actor-partner interdependence analysis demonstrated that it is the actor's *own* perception of how the relationship is going at a given point in time—rather than the partner's or some general dyad-level of SRS—that is producing these results. This finding is consistent with our hypothesis that SRS creates a specific motivational mindset in the actor that may then translate into more goal-directed activities.

Even though the focus of our research design was on investigating the more short-term processes through which relationship satisfaction may affect daily goal pursuit, Study 1 also yielded some evidence for a reciprocal, more long-term effect of goal pursuit on relationship quality (our tertiary prediction). Specifically, a residual change analysis suggested that those partners who had made above-average progress during the week-long snapshot of goal pursuits experienced a relative increase in overall relationship satisfaction from pretest to posttest, whereas those who made below-average progress experienced a relative decline, compared to people with average progress. Viewed in concert, these findings suggest that relationship satisfaction and goal pursuit may be linked in reciprocal ways. We will revisit these issues more broadly in the general discussion.

## Study 2: Experimental Manipulation of State Relationship Satisfaction

Study 1 employed an ecologically valid research design that capitalizes on naturally occurring variations in SRS and markers of effective self-regulation. However, such a design comes at the potential cost of internal validity because the causal direction of effects remains uncertain. To complement Study 1 with more solid causal evidence for the proposed mechanisms, we therefore created a novel experimental manipulation of SRS in Study 2. After having reported on an important goal they intended to accomplish, participants engaged in an experimental procedure intended to create group differences in SRS, before completing a series of self-report questionnaires assessing our four key self-regulatory processes as well as motivation to achieve the goal. Based on our motivational mindset framework, our key prediction was that participants in the high SRS condition would report higher levels of perceived control, predicted goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect than those in the low SRS condition, and that those changes would in turn predict higher motivation for the goal at hand.

### Method

**Participants.** Two hundred Amazon.com Mechanical Turk volunteers in the United States participated in the study (58.5% males, mean age = 33.7,  $SD = 10.1$ ). To be eligible for participation, participants had to be involved in an exclusive romantic relationship. One participant was excluded for not meeting this criterion. The average relationship length was 6.9 years ( $SD = 8.6$ ). Because instructions required that participants list nontrivial goals, we excluded one participant from analyses because he indicated that the reported goal was only of very low value to him (score of 1 on the 0-to-6 goal value scale described below). Four further participants failed to correctly complete an item designed to measure whether participants were paying attention (“To monitor data quality, please move this slider to the number 0 on this slider.”). The final sample thus consisted of 195 participants.



**Procedure.** First, participants were asked to choose a goal they were trying to accomplish tomorrow or later that day, using the same wording as in Study 1. We further specified that “It could be any nontrivial goal from any sphere in your life. Please do not mention the goal of completing this survey; instead, please think of a goal you hope to accomplish tomorrow or later today.” We asked participants to choose a goal before the manipulation of relationship satisfaction because we sought to exclude any possible effects of our relationship satisfaction manipulation on the type of goal chosen (even though Study 1’s supplementary analysis reported in Footnote 5 did not suggest a confound between SRS and goal type).

Next, drawing on novel work on how to experimentally manipulate life satisfaction (Luhmann & Hennecke, 2014), we manipulated relationship satisfaction by assigning participants randomly to two conditions in which they had to selectively think about either positive or negative aspects of their current relationship. Participants in the *high relationship satisfaction* condition read that “There are many things in our romantic relationships that work out well. Using the space below, please think about and list three things that are good about your relationship.” In the *low relationship satisfaction* condition they read that “There are many things in our relationships that do not work out so well. Using the space below, please think about and list three things that are not good about your relationship.”

Following this SRS manipulation, the software presented participants with their own verbatim goal description and asked them to report, in random order, their *perceived control* [(“How much do you feel in control over accomplishing this?”, 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*)], *predicted goal focus* [(“How much do you think you will be able to focus on getting this done?” and “How much do you think you will be mentally distracted by other things when trying to get this done?” (R); 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*);  $\alpha = .60$ )], *perceived partner support* [(“How supportive or unsupportive do you feel your partner will be in your pursuit of

this?” and “How much do you think your partner will make it easier or more difficult for you to accomplish this?” , -3 (*very unsupportive/a lot more difficult*) to +3 (*very supportive/a lot easier*);  $\alpha = .58$ ], and their current level of *positive affect* [(“How happy do you feel at the moment?” -3 (*very unhappy*) to 3 (*very happy*))]. For ease of presentation, we recoded values on the perceived goal support and positive affect items to the 0-to-6 metric. Note also that, in Study 1, goal focus was assessed in an activity-related way by first prompting participants to indicate what they were actually doing at the moment, and then asking participants to indicate the instrumentality of that activity for their current goal. Because Study 2 was about future accomplishments that had not yet been initiated, such an activity-related procedure was not sensible. We therefore assessed predicted goal focus.

As a manipulation check, participants reported on a -3-to-+3 scale, their level of satisfaction in their relationship (“How satisfied are you with your relationship with your partner at the moment?”). They also indicated how valuable the goal they reported was to them on a scale from 0 to 6. Finally, they indicated to which of the 13 life domains assessed in Study 1 the target goal was oriented (e.g., academic/professional, health/fitness) and provided demographic information.

Given that this study employed a one-shot experimental design (one without longitudinal procedures), we assessed goal motivation as a proxy for actual goal progress. To this end, we asked “How motivated are you to accomplish this?” and “How much effort are you willing to invest in realizing this goal?” ( $\alpha = .75$ ).

## Results

**Manipulation check.** An independent samples *t*-test predicting self-reported relationship satisfaction from the experimental manipulation revealed that participants in the high relationship satisfaction condition ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ) reported higher levels of state relationship satisfaction than participants in the low relationship satisfaction condition ( $M =$

1.84,  $SE = 0.13$ ),  $t(193) = 3.17$ ,  $p = .002$ . Thus, the experimental manipulation of SRS was successful. Participants across the conditions did not differ by age, gender composition, or relationship duration, all  $ps > .33$ . Participants in both conditions reported relationship-related goals with similar frequency (average: 19.4%),  $\chi^2 = 0.58$ ,  $p = .447$ .

**Hypothesis testing.** We conducted a series of independent-samples  $t$ -tests to examine how the manipulation of relationship satisfaction influenced self-regulatory processes (see Figure 4). As hypothesized, participants in the high satisfaction condition, compared to those in the low satisfaction condition, reported higher perceived control regarding their selected goal,  $M = 5.06$ ,  $SE = 0.12$  vs.  $M = 4.64$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ ,  $t(193) = 2.10$ ,  $p = .037$ , and marginally higher self-reported goal focus,  $M = 3.88$ ,  $SE = 0.10$  vs.  $M = 3.65$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $t(193) = 0.40$ ,  $p = .084$ . Participants in the high satisfaction condition, compared to those in the low satisfaction condition, also reported significantly greater perceived partner support,  $M = 5.17$ ,  $SE = 0.09$  vs.  $M = 4.50$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $t(193) = 4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , and positive affect,  $M = 4.73$ ,  $SE = 0.13$  vs.  $M = 4.27$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ,  $t(193) = 2.45$ ,  $p < .015$ .

To test whether our continuous measure of SRS mediates the effect of our manipulation on the four hypothesized facilitators of goal pursuit, we conducted a series of four mediation analyses on the four dependent variables using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2012; 2013). The manipulation indirectly influenced all four facilitators through its effect on SRS ( $a = .56$ ,  $p = .002$ ). The four indirect effects were estimated at  $ab_{\text{control}} = .17$ ,  $ab_{\text{goal focus}} = .07$ ,  $ab_{\text{support}} = .15$ , and  $ab_{\text{affect}} = .22$ . Bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals for each indirect effect were entirely above zero.

Lastly, we found that our measure of goal motivation was affected by the SRS manipulation such that participants in the high satisfaction condition reported significantly higher motivation towards their goals than those in the low satisfaction condition,  $M = 5.21$ ,  $SE = 0.10$  vs.  $M = 4.88$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ),  $t(193) = 2.37$ ,  $p = .019$ . Moreover, a multiple mediation

analysis with SRS as predictor, the four facilitators as mediating variables, and goal motivation as the outcome (summarized in Supplementary Figure 3) revealed a significant overall mediation effect,  $ab_{total} = .15$  (95% CI from .08 to .26). A closer look at the four indirect effects constituting the overall effect revealed that the confidence intervals for the indirect effects via perceived control,  $ab = .06$ , perceived partner support,  $ab = .05$ , and affective positivity,  $ab = .05$ , each did not include zero. Self-reported goal focus did not reliably contribute to the overall mediation effect,  $ab = .004$  (95% CI from -.01 to .03).

## Discussion

Study 2 demonstrated that experiencing relationship satisfaction causes people to experience higher perceived control, somewhat higher self-reported goal focus, higher perceived partner support regarding a current goal pursuit, as well as higher levels of positive affect. These results replicate the findings obtained in Study 1, with the exception of the weaker (albeit directionally identical) effect for goal focus, which had been assessed more objectively (i.e., activity-related) in Study 1. A proxy of goal progress tapping into goal motivation was also affected by the SRS manipulation, and mediation analyses indicated reliable indirect effects from SRS to goal motivation through perceived control, perceived partner support, and positive affect. We believe that the absence of a more robust indirect effect via goal focus may be due to the fact that people had to make predictions about their goal focus during future goal pursuit. Because goal focus is truly an “in the moment” construct, in that the interest is on whether a given goal is being shielded from irrelevant, non-instrumental activity, it is possible that the activity-based assessment of goal focus in Study 1 may have been superior to the prospective assessment strategy in Study 2.

Taken together, the results from Study 2 lend additional support to the conclusions based on the experience-sampling data gathered in Study 1. Most important, the experimental methodology provide some evidence in support of the causal mechanisms of our model. The

results from Study 2 thus complement the picture obtained in Study 1, and increase our confidence that the associations and mediation effects obtained in Study 1 may be cautiously interpreted as representing motivational mindset effects resulting from state fluctuations in SRS.

### **General Discussion**

How do the ups and downs of close relationships affect everyday goal pursuits? In the present research, we examined the relationship between state relationship satisfaction (SRS) and self-regulatory success. Specifically, we investigated the hypothesis that SRS positively affects a motivational mindset consisting of four identified facilitators of goal pursuit: perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. In Study 1, an extensive smartphone experience-sampling study, we tracked fluctuations in SRS over the course of the day in more than one hundred couples for the duration of a week. We found that SRS was reliably associated with all four facilitators during goal pursuit, and predicted better goal performance by the end of the day. All four facilitators independently mediated the effects of SRS on goal performance, suggesting unique processes. In short, people are more successful in their daily strivings when their romantic relationship is going better than usual, and less successful when their relationship is going worse than usual. These findings at the within-participant process level were obtained across a large variety of different everyday goals, speaking to the breadth and generality of these effects. A limitation of our approach in Study 1, of course, is that causality is unclear, and there is good reason to wonder about bi-directional and reverse directional links among some of these constructs. In particular, positive affect and perceived partner support may also lead to temporary increases in SRS. We do not doubt that the associations among these variables are complex, bi-directional, and dynamic.

In Study 2, we therefore complemented the data from everyday life with a controlled experiment. In this experiment, we were able to successfully manipulate SRS through a novel

paradigm, and to provide some stronger evidence of the causal influence of SRS on our key measures. We replicated the effects of SRS on perceived control, perceived partner support, and positive affect, and showed that these facilitators mediated the effect of SRS on motivation (a proxy for performance). Goal focus effects were not fully replicated, perhaps because they were assessed in a less sophisticated way than in Study 1. Study 2 thus largely supports our model's assertion that SRS may play a causal role in eliciting a motivational mindset conducive for goal pursuit.

### **Linking Relationship States with Motivational Processes**

The present research is part of an emerging theme in relationships research attempting to more closely link the study of relationships with the study of intra-psychological processes of motivation, self-regulation, and goal pursuit (Finkel & Fitzsimons, 2011; Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010). Perhaps reflecting the broader field of social psychology's emphasis on counter-intuitive phenomena in recent decades, this program of research has amassed a disconnected set of specific processes. As such, we have largely neglected some of the most basic, fundamental questions about how relationships and self-regulation interact. In the current research, we sought to investigate links between foundational relationship characteristics and self-regulation, asking how relationship satisfaction relates to goal processes and progress.

In addition to providing the first tests of such links, the present research, to our knowledge, is also the first to capture and quantify state fluctuations in relationship satisfaction over time in an ecologically valid setting (Study 1) as well as to suggest a way through which it can be experimentally manipulated (Study 2). As we hope to have shown, these two approaches can complement each other in useful ways. Such a multimethod approach may be a good foundation for addressing research questions that deal with general, broad effects of relationships on other domains in life, as well as for more rigidly testing hypotheses about

what types of relationship or external events may cause state fluctuations in central relationship parameters.

In this work, we have introduced a conceptual model of how SRS may affect self-regulation, via effects on what we termed a motivational mindset—a set of four basic goal-facilitating processes. The model is intra-individual in that it examines how subjective relationship satisfaction may instigate internal self-regulatory processes. In doing so, it integrates cognitive (perceived control, goal focus), social (perceived partner support), and affective (positive affect) dimensions that have been shown to be conducive for goal pursuit in prior research.

The conclusion that emerges is that SRS has an array of distinctive motivating effects. First, higher-than-typical SRS is associated with higher feelings of control regarding one's current goal pursuit. We suggest that this association emerges because relationship satisfaction promotes a sense of stability and predictability, by minimizing the potential variance in day-to-day experience caused by relationship conflict and anxiety. When people's everyday lives feel more stable and predictable, they feel more in control over their ability to pursue their goals.

It is important to note that scholars have theorized that the positive effect of personal control on motivation may be driven by positive expectations about goal attainment (Carver et al., 2000). That is, control over a goal implies moving that goal in the desired direction; thus, measures of control over goals may reflect positive expectations. In a study of breast cancer patients, researchers showed that good disease outcomes, but not personal control over the disease, predicted distress (Carver et al., 2000). Although recent research has suggested that control can be manipulated and measured independently of expected outcomes (Gaucher, Hafer, Kay, & Davidenko, 2010; Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008; Whitson & Galinsky, 2008), and our Study 1 data suggested that the two were only moderately correlated, it is nonetheless clear that control in the goal domain is tightly related to positive expectations

about goal outcomes. Thus, it is possible that optimism about goal outcomes may be playing an important role in our control findings; we hope to further clarify this in future research.

Second, higher-than-typical SRS also appears to be conducive for goal focus. This finding emerged in Study 1, where an indirect procedure was used to tap into goal focus, but did not replicate when asking people to predict future goal focus in Study 2. As we believe Study 2 was the first study to attempt to measure goal focus with a predictive self-report measure, we speculate that such a measure may have been unreliable. Given the in-the-moment nature of goal focus, people may have had a harder time predicting their future goal focus. It is possible that indirect assessment procedures as the one used in Study 1 may be preferable for isolating such mechanisms in everyday life settings.

In Study 1, people high in SRS reported that the activities they were pursuing at the moment when they received the signal were more instrumental to the goals they wanted to accomplish at that point in time. In other words, people low in SRS appeared more distracted in their everyday goal pursuits, engaging in activities that were not as instrumental for goal progress. We interpret this pattern of results as indicating that SRS may affect people's ability to successfully focus on their goal, shielding their goal from everyday distractions, competing goals, and temptations. In line with earlier research from other domains (Kemps et al., 2008; Klein & Boals, 2001; Schmader & Johns, 2003; Schoofs et al., 2008), we suggest that negative as compared to positive SRS creates relationship worries and distress that intrude into working memory, thus reducing people's self-regulatory capacity at focusing and concentrating on those activities that would be most conducive for achieving their current goal pursuits. The present results thus seem to point to a novel connection between SRS and the executive functions that have been argued to support goal shielding processes, thus linking relationship processes to a basic cognitive level of analysis (for other examples, see Pronk, Karremans,



Overbeek, Vermulst, & Wigboldus, 2010). Given that we did not replicate these findings in the experimental study, however, these conclusions about goal focus are necessarily tentative.

Third, higher-than-typical SRS appears to promote perceptions of partner support. Study 2 is of particular note here, as it addresses the alternative explanation that perceived partner support had driven relationship satisfaction in Study 1. To be sure, such an effect also exists (see Brunstein et al., 1996) and may be part of what is tapped in Study 1's association of SRS and perceived partner support. However, the experimental results of Study 2 also lend support for the complementary direction of the effect—namely, that heightened relationship satisfaction generates a cognitive mindset in which one's partner is perceived as being more supportive with regard to the goals one pursues. Along with other studies of positive illusions (e.g., Murray et al., 1996), these findings suggest that relationship satisfaction leads to a broad array of motivated perceptions of the relationship partner. In this case, these motivated perceptions promote goal pursuit. Whether goal pursuit is driven “just” by these motivated perceptions, or whether these beliefs and expectations may also elicit and correspond to actual helping behavior by the partner is an important issue for future research.

Fourth, our results show that SRS is a source of positive affect and confirm the motivating power of positive affect (Fishbach & Labroo, 2007; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). As has been argued, positive affect may act as a signal that resources are adequate, leading people to approach challenging goals more readily and invest substantial amounts of effort into their pursuit (Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2001). Happy relationships promote positive sentiment, and this appears to promote goal progress. Importantly, by isolating the indirect effect of positive affect on goal pursuit in our analyses, we could demonstrate that the relationship between SRS and goal performance is not exclusively accounted for by an affective component; rather, cognitive factors (perceived control, goal shielding, perceived partner support) also play an essential part in our motivational-mindset account.

### **The Reciprocal Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction and Goal Achievement**

The current research was designed to explore the possibility that relationship satisfaction may shape goal pursuit. As we noted in our introduction, however, that effect may be part of a larger bi-directional connection between relationship quality and goal achievement. Earlier work has indirectly suggested that people who have high self-control—and thus are likely to experience more goal success—feel more satisfied with their relationships (Vohs et al., 2011). The present research directly investigated this link by testing whether changes in relationship satisfaction over one week are predicted by goal progress made during that week. Indeed, in the present study there was some evidence for the reciprocal nature of this link, such that people who made more progress on their goals during the week tended to experience a relative increase in relationship satisfaction over the week whereas those who made little progress tended to experience a relative decrease in relation to what would have been expected based on their pretest levels.

Viewed in concert, the connection between satisfaction and goal achievement may well take on a central role in the development of close relationships: Those relationships that allow people to be more successful on their important everyday goals may survive and mature, whereas those that stifle people's goal achievement too often may eventually fail. Even though more speculative at this point, the nature of these dynamics may be further qualified by other self-regulatory and relationship variables. For instance, the current findings suggest that at least some of the mechanisms linking relationship satisfaction to facilitators of self-regulation are particularly potent at earlier stages of a relationship. Although we did not advance hypotheses regarding moderating effects of relationship duration a priori, these findings suggest that temporary perturbations in relationship satisfaction may be especially influential among less-established (vs. more-established) couples because a key feature of developing an

established relationship may be found in the reduced susceptibility to the effects of moment-to-moment fluctuations in relationship quality.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, the present work suggests that the quality of close relationships has important implications for how well people accomplish their everyday goals. It also sheds light on the processes through which relationship satisfaction may translate into better goal achievement: by making individuals feel happier and more confident that they can control their outcomes, by allowing them to focus their action on what is truly useful, and by leading them to see the social world as supportive of their goal pursuit.

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**Authors' Note**

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The software was programmed for the purpose of this study with the help of a professional programmer, using an asp.net framework in conjunction with a SMS to SMS gateway. It has now been made available for other researchers to use under the name “SurveySignal” (Hofmann & Patel, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Due to space limitations, parameter estimates for day are not shown in tables, readers interested in those results are asked to contact the first author.

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of brevity, henceforth we will only report the  $p$  value from the gender moderation analyses.

<sup>4</sup> Because the goal performance index was left-skewed, we conducted a robustness analysis on reversed, log-transformed scores for all models involving this dependent outcome. Results were very robust and none of the statistical conclusions were affected by the log-transformed analyses.

<sup>5</sup> We focused our analyses on the link between SRS and the four key mediator variables (perceived control, goal focus, effort, perceived partner support) rather than on the link between these mediators and goal progress, as those latter links are established in the published literature and not of central interest to the present article.

<sup>6</sup> A supplementary logistic multilevel analysis showed that SRS was not statistically related to whether participants pursued a relationship or non-relationship goal,  $B_{\log} = .05$ ,  $p = .149$ .

<sup>7</sup> Effects of aggregated goal performance were in the same direction, but less reliable when conducting a change score analysis,  $B = .10$ ,  $p = .27$ . Because a discussion of the pros and cons of the residual change and difference score approach are beyond the scope of this article, we refer the reader to classic and recent discussions (Cronbach & Furby, 1970; Gollwitzer, Christ, & Lemmer, 2014; Linn & Slinde, 1977; Van Breukelen, 2013).



Table 1. *Study 1: Multilevel Dyadic Random Intercepts-Only Model of SRS.*

Fixed Effects	SRS		
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Overall Estimates</i>			
Intercept	2.05	0.07	<.001
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>			
M Intercept	2.04	0.08	<.001
F Intercept	2.05	0.09	<.001
<i>Random Effects</i>			
<i>Level-2 (between-couple)</i>			
M RIntercept	0.65	0.10	<.001
F RIntercept	0.82	0.13	<.001
M-F RIntercept Covariance	0.26	0.09	.002
<i>Level-1 (within-couple)</i>			
M Residual	0.90	0.03	<.001
F Residual	0.98	0.03	<.001
M-F Residual Covariance	0.21	0.02	<.001
Autocorrelation	0.47	0.01	<.001
<i>Sample/Model Information</i>			
Number of Observations	6653		
Chi Square	17547		
BIC	17580		

*Note.* Estimates based on 224 participants from 115 dyads. M = Male; F = Female; SRS = State Relationship Satisfaction; RIntercept = Random Intercept; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion.

Table 2. Study 1: Dyadic Process Analyses relating SRS to Facilitators of Self-Regulation.

	Perceived Control			Goal focus			Perceived Partner Support			Positive Affect		
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
Fixed Effects (within)												
<i>Overall Estimates</i>												
Intercept	4.60	0.05	<.001	1.73	0.06	<.001	0.99	0.06	<.001	1.40	0.05	<.001
SRS Slope	0.16	0.02	<.001	0.13	0.03	<.001	0.34	0.02	<.001	0.53	0.02	<.001
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>												
M Intercept	4.55	0.07	<.001	1.71	0.08	<.001	0.84 <sub>a</sub>	0.08	<.001	1.50 <sub>a</sub>	0.07	<.001
F Intercept	4.65	0.06	<.001	1.74	0.09	<.001	1.15 <sub>b</sub>	0.07	<.001	1.30 <sub>b</sub>	0.06	<.001
M SRS Slope	0.16	0.04	<.001	0.14	0.04	.002	0.35	0.03	<.001	0.54	0.03	<.001
F SRS Slope	0.17	0.03	<.001	0.12	0.04	.001	0.34	0.03	<.001	0.51	0.03	<.001
Fixed Effects (between)												
<i>Overall Estimates</i>												
SRS between effect	0.08	0.05	0.121	0.03	0.07	0.664	0.30	0.06	<.001	0.59	0.05	<.001
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>												
M SRS between effect	0.17	0.08	0.045	-0.02	0.09	0.855	0.45 <sub>a</sub>	0.09	<.001	0.80 <sub>a</sub>	0.08	<.001
F SRS between effect	0.00	0.07	0.964	0.07	0.09	0.426	0.15 <sub>b</sub>	0.07	0.04	0.39 <sub>b</sub>	0.07	<.001
Random Effects												
<i>Level-2 (between-couple)</i>												
M RIntercept	0.33	0.06	<.001	0.40	0.08	<.001	0.51	0.09	<.001	0.37	0.06	<.001
F RIntercept	0.31	0.06	<.001	0.62	0.11	<.001	0.43	0.08	<.001	0.34	0.06	<.001
M-F RIntercept Cov.	0.03	0.05	.476	0.02	0.07	.720	0.13	0.06	.029	0.14	0.05	.004
<i>Level-1 (within-couple)</i>												
M Residual	2.00	0.07	<.001	2.95	0.10	<.001	1.63	0.05	<.001	1.07	0.04	<.001
F Residual	1.90	0.06	<.001	2.74	0.08	<.001	1.64	0.05	<.001	1.33	0.04	<.001
M-F Residual Cov.	0.04	0.05	.496	0.01	0.08	.861	0.25	0.04	<.001	0.15	0.03	<.001
Autocorrelation	0.14	0.02	<.001	0.06	0.02	.001	0.16	0.02	<.001	0.30	0.02	<.001
Sample/Model Information												
Number of Observations	4499			4501			4500			4491		

BIC	16049	17829	15301	13678
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*Note.* Estimates based on 227 participants from 115 dyads. M = Male; F = Female; SRS = SRS; RIntercept = Random Intercept; Cov. = Covariance; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. Different subscripts (a/b) for Male and Female effects indicate significant moderation by gender. Perceived control was measured on a scale from 1 to 6; Goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect were measured on a scale from -3 to +3.

Table 3. *Study 1: Dyadic Process Analysis of the Effects of Facilitators of Self-Regulation on Goal Performance Assessed at the End of the Day.*

Fixed Effects (within)	Goal Performance		
	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Overall Estimates</i>			
Intercept	4.97	0.04	<.001
Control	0.17	0.01	<.001
Goal focus	0.07	0.01	<.001
Perceived Partner Support	0.07	0.01	<.001
Positive Affect	0.04	0.02	.018
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>			
M Intercept	4.98	0.05	<.001
F Intercept	4.95	0.06	<.001
M Control	0.16	0.02	<.001
F Control	0.19	0.02	<.001
M Goal focus	0.07	0.02	<.001
F Goal focus	0.07	0.02	<.001
M Perceived Partner Support	0.09	0.02	<.001
F Perceived Partner Support	0.06	0.02	.006
M Positive Affect	0.01	0.03	.587
F Positive Affect	0.07	0.02	.002
<i>Fixed Effects (between)</i>			
<i>Overall Estimates</i>			
Control	0.20	0.06	<.001
Goal focus	0.19	0.05	<.001
Perceived Partner Support	-0.06	0.05	.228
Positive Affect	0.15	0.05	.004
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>			
M Control	0.30	0.08	<.001
F Control	0.09	0.08	.301
M Goal focus	0.11	0.07	.121
F Goal focus	0.26	0.06	<.001
M Perceived Partner Support	-0.05	0.07	.532
F Perceived Partner Support	-0.08	0.08	.285
M Positive Affect	0.17	0.07	.015
F Positive Affect	0.14	0.08	.081
<i>Random Effects</i>			
<i>Level-2 (between-couple)</i>			
M RIntercept	0.15	0.04	<.001
F RIntercept	0.21	0.05	<.001
M-F RIntercept Covariance	0.02	0.03	.531
<i>Level-1 (within-couple)</i>			
M Residual	1.20	0.04	<.001

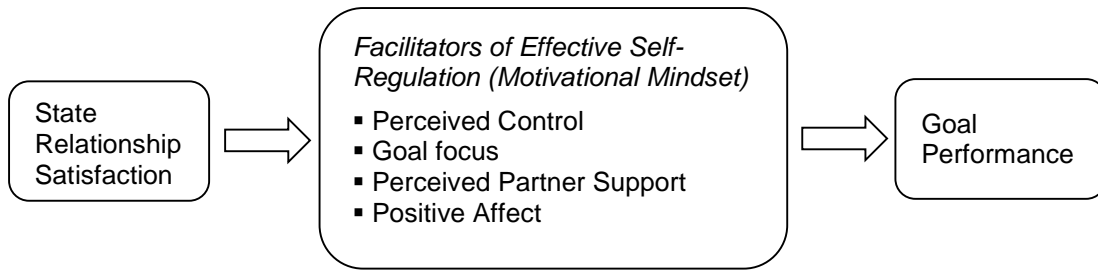
F Residual	1.31	0.04	<.001
M-F Residual Covariance	0.03	0.04	.421
Autocorrelation	0.17	0.02	<.001
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<b>Sample/Model Information</b>			
<hr/>			
Number of Observations	3877		
BIC	12170		
<hr/>			

*Note.* Estimates based on 211 participants from 111 dyads. M = Male; F = Female; SRS = SRS; RIntercept = Random Intercept; BIC = .Bayesian Information Criterion. None of the gender-specific parameters was significantly moderated by gender.

Table 4. Study 1: Moderator Analyses of the Effects of SRS on Facilitators of Self-Regulation.

Moderator	Perceived Control				Goal focus				Perceived Support				Positive Affect			
	Main effect	<i>p</i>	IA effect	<i>p</i>	Main effect	<i>p</i>	IA effect	<i>p</i>	Main effect	<i>p</i>	IA effect	<i>p</i>	Main effect	<i>p</i>	IA effect	<i>p</i>
Relationship goal (1) vs. other goal (0)	-0.28	<.001	0.19	<.001	0.10	.110	0.16	.015	0.68	<.001	0.26	<.001	0.18	<.001	0.19	<.001
Partner present (1) vs. absent (0)	-0.06	<.001	0.05	.324	0.01	.818	0.09	.147	0.47	<.001	0.18	<.001	0.31	<.001	0.18	<.001
Relationship duration (in years)	0.03	.075	-0.03	.009	0.02	.268	0.00	.824	0.01	.553	0.01	.382	0.02	.222	-0.03	<.001

Note. IA effect = interaction effect (SRS  $\times$  moderator variable). Main (i.e., average) effects for SRS from the moderated regression analyses are not shown (these are highly similar to the ones reported in Table 2). \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework linking state fluctuations in relationship satisfaction, four key facilitators of effective self-regulation (motivational mindset), and goal performance.

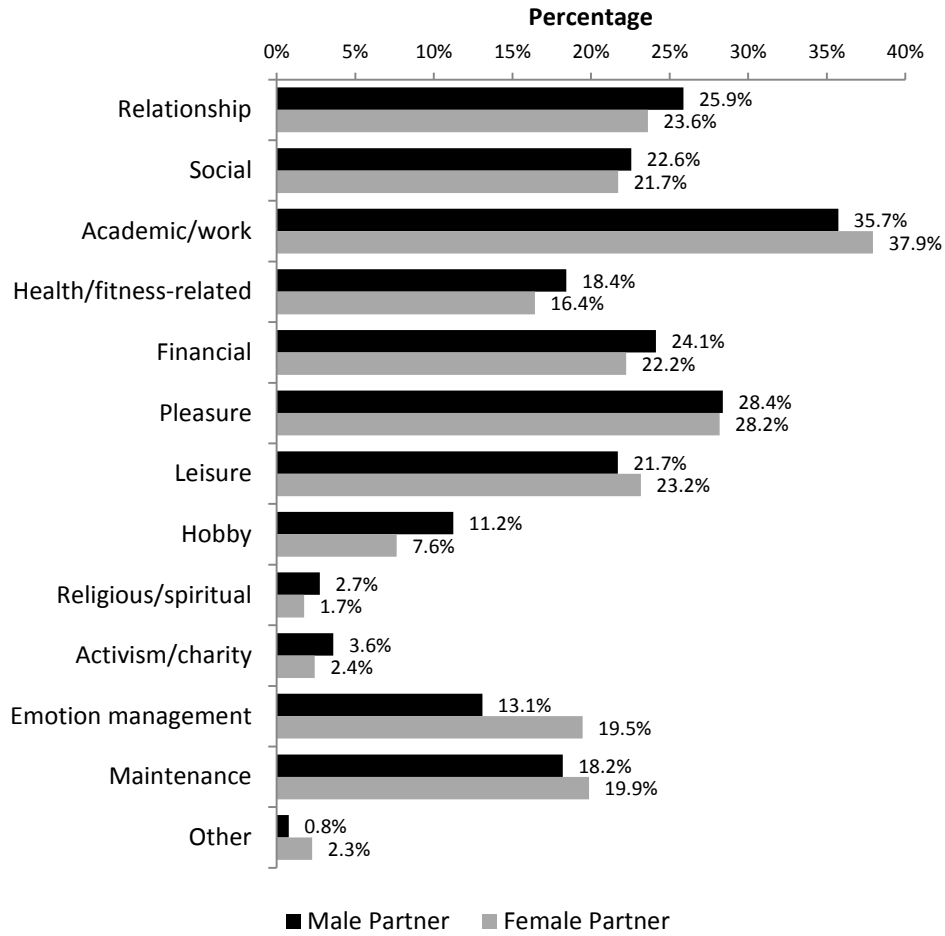
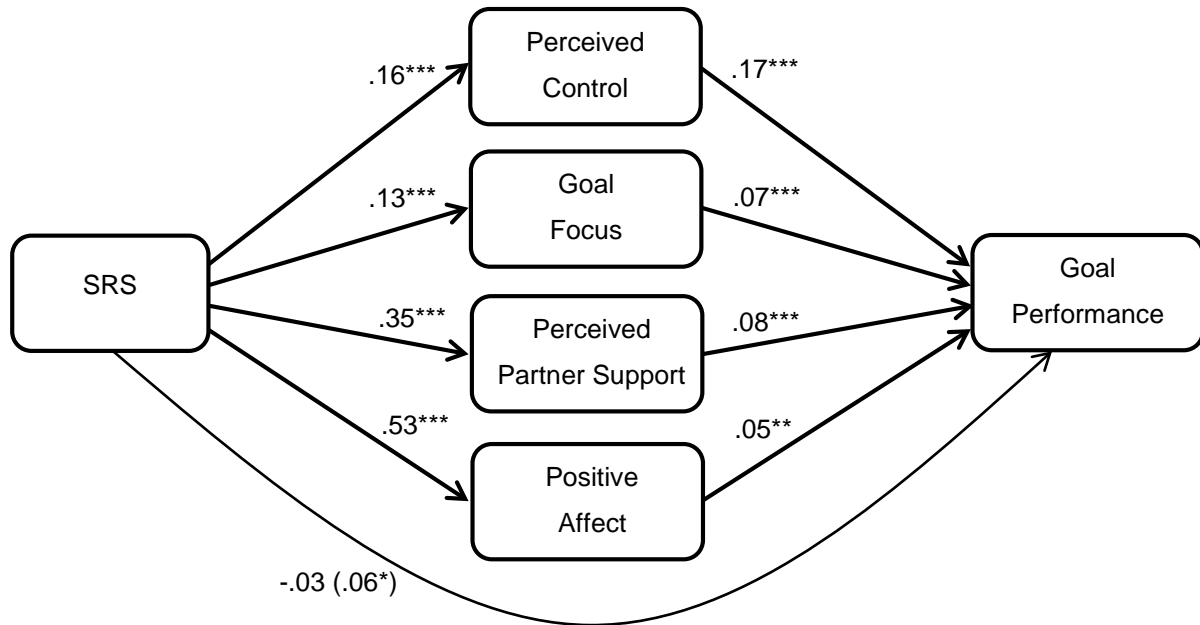


Figure 2. Study 1: Male and female partner percentages with which current goals were classified as serving one or multiple broader goal domains in life. Percentages add up to more than 100% because multiple goal domains could be indicated as being served by each current goal.





*Figure 3.* Study 1: Summary of mediation analysis showing how the effect of SRS on goal performance at the end of the day is mediated via perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. Coefficients represent unstandardized effects. Values in parentheses represent the total effect. All individual mediation pathways are reliable at  $p < .05$  as assessed via the Monte Carlo method.

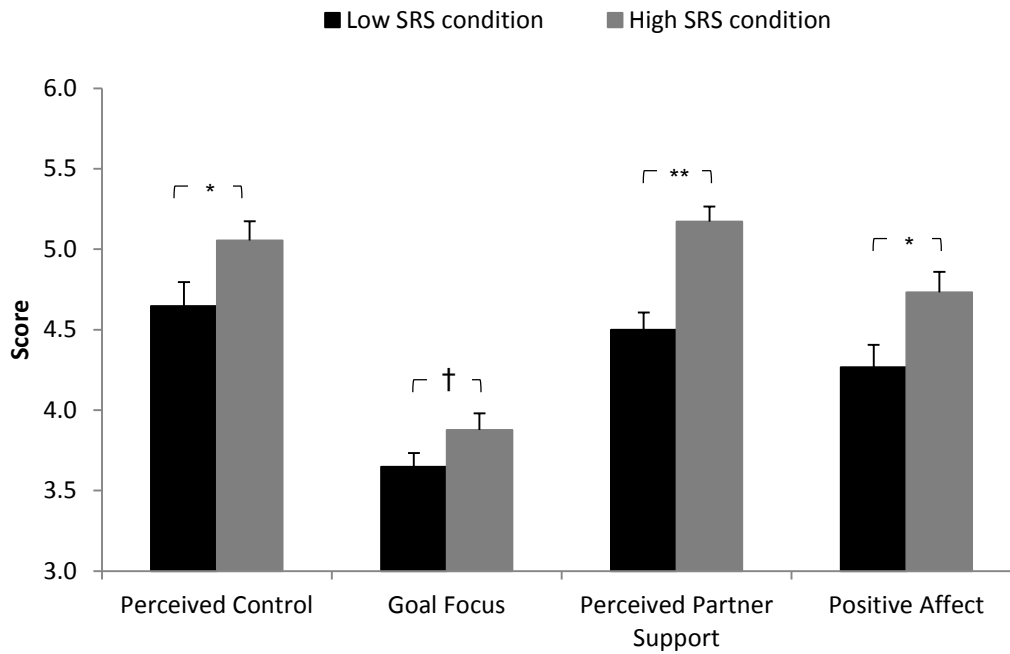


Figure 4. Study 2: The effects of the state relationship satisfaction manipulation on perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. Error bars represent standard errors. †  $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Supplemental Online Material for**

“Close Relationships and Self-Regulation: How Relationship Satisfaction Facilitates Momentary Goal Pursuit“

(Hofmann, W., Finkel, E. J., Fitzsimons, G. M., in press, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*)

*Supplementary Table 1.* Study 1: Estimated SRS throughout a given day as a function of whether partner reported disagreement (left panel) or sexual intercourse with other partner (right panel) on a given day.

SRS				SRS			
Fixed Effects	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	Fixed Effects	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Overall Estimates</i>				<i>Overall Estimates</i>			
Intercept (no disagreement)	2.19	0.07	<.001	Intercept (no sex)	2.04	0.07	<.001
Disagreement Slope	-0.49	0.05	<.001	Sex Slope	0.18	0.04	<.001
<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>				<i>Gender-Specific Estimates</i>			
M Intercept	2.17	0.08	<.001	M Intercept	1.98	0.09	<.001
F Intercept	2.22	0.08	<.001	F Intercept	2.09	0.09	<.001
M Disagreement Slope	-0.48	0.07	<.001	M Sex Slope	0.28 <sub>a</sub>	0.06	<.001
F SRS Slope	-0.49	0.06	<.001	F Sex Slope	0.08 <sub>b</sub>	0.06	<.001
Random Effects				Random Effects			
<i>Level-2 (between-couple)</i>				<i>Level-2 (between-couple)</i>			
M RIntercept	0.62	0.10	<.001	M RIntercept	0.64	0.10	<.001
F RIntercept	0.67	0.11	<.001	F RIntercept	0.71	0.11	<.001
M-F RIntercept Cov.	0.14	0.08	.041	M-F RIntercept Cov.	0.16	0.08	.041
<i>Level-1 (within-couple)</i>				<i>Level-1 (within-couple)</i>			
M Residual	0.88	0.03	<.001	M Residual	0.90	0.03	<.001
F Residual	0.86	0.03	<.001	F Residual	0.89	0.03	<.001
M-F Residual Cov.	0.17	0.02	<.001	M-F Residual Cov.	0.19	0.02	<.001
Autocorrelation	0.47	0.01	<.001	Autocorrelation	0.48	0.01	<.001

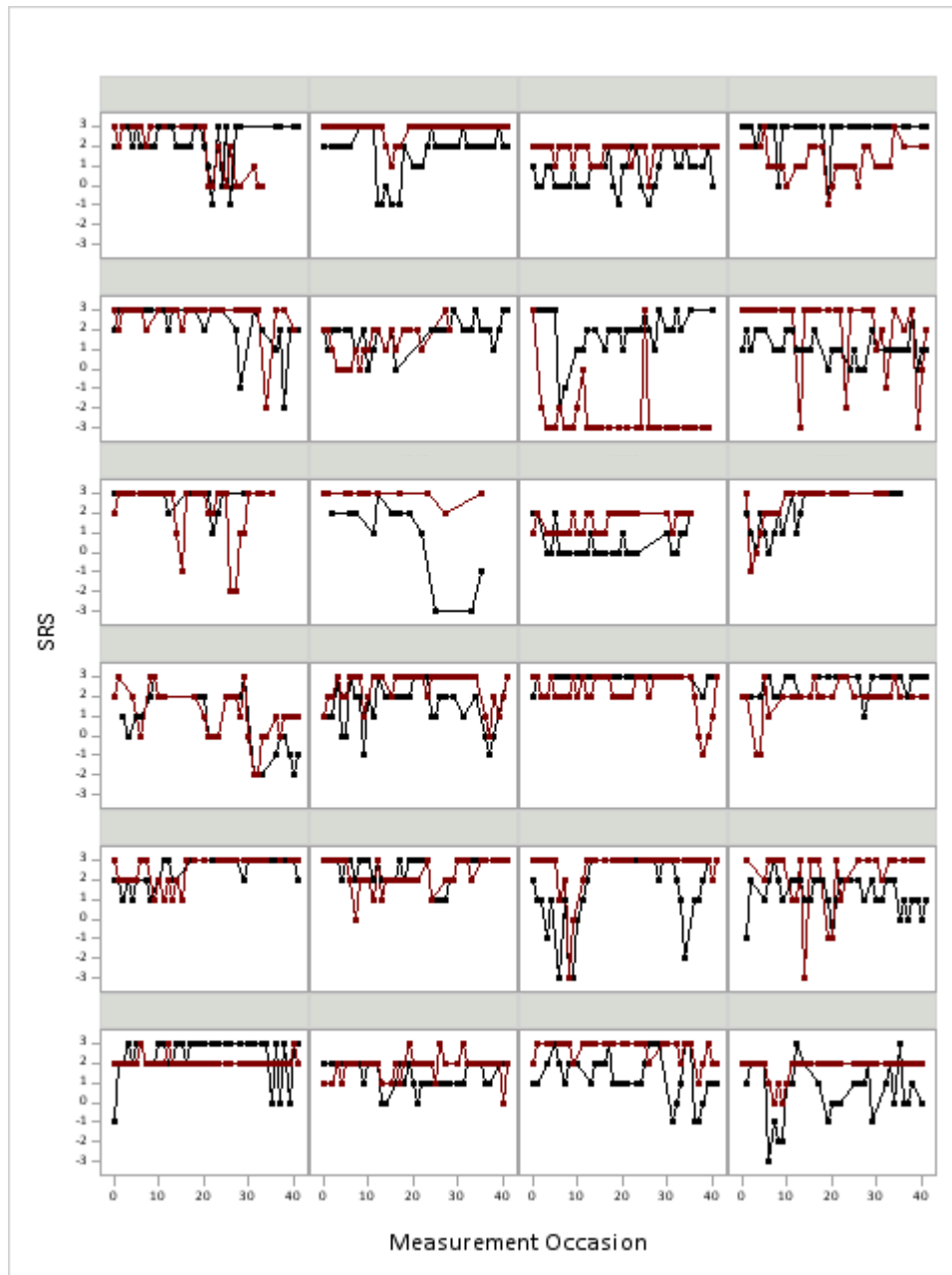
Sample/Model Information		Sample/Model Information	
Number of Observations	5743	Number of Observations	5743
BIC	14766	BIC	14869

*Note.* Estimates based on 224 participants from 110 dyads. M = Male; F = Female; SRS = SRS; RIntercept = Random Intercept; Cov. = Covariance; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. Different subscripts (a/b) for Male and Female Intercepts or Slopes indicate significant moderation by gender. Sex = Sexual intercourse.

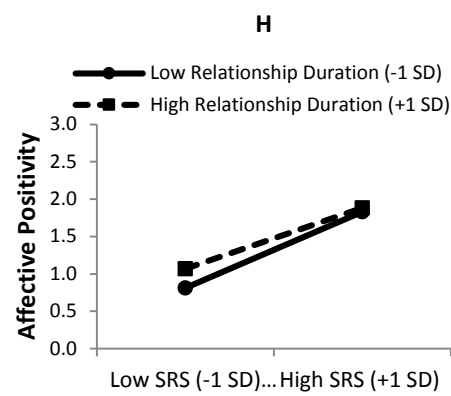
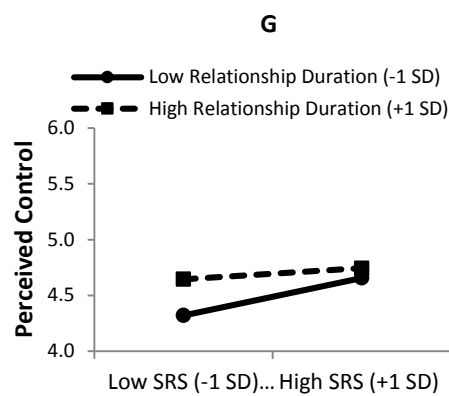
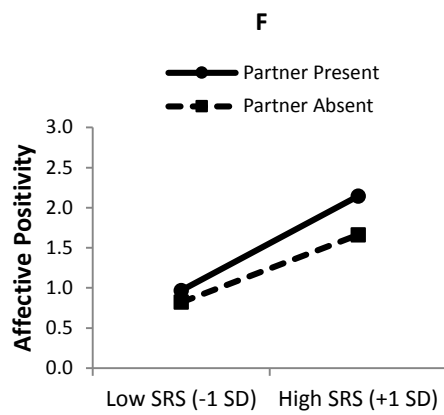
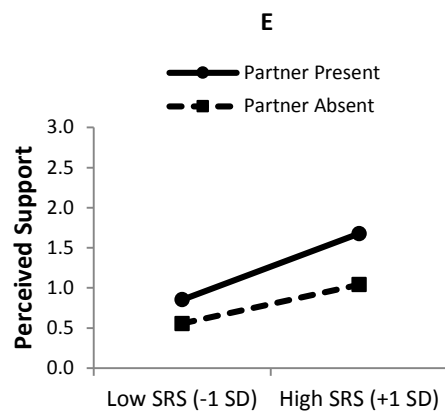
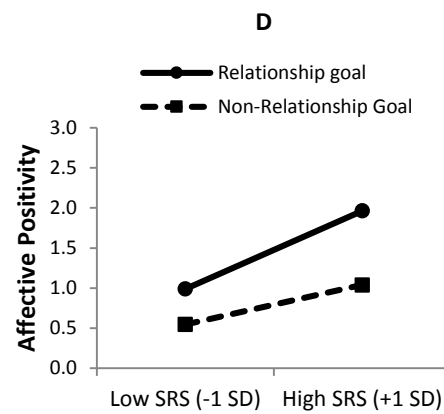
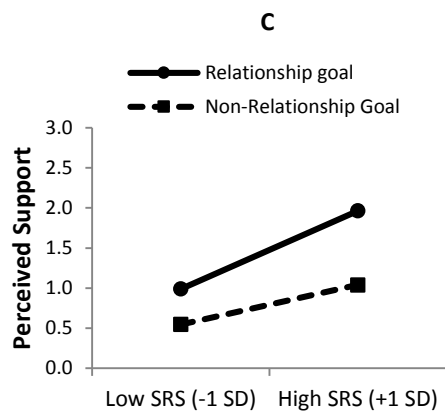
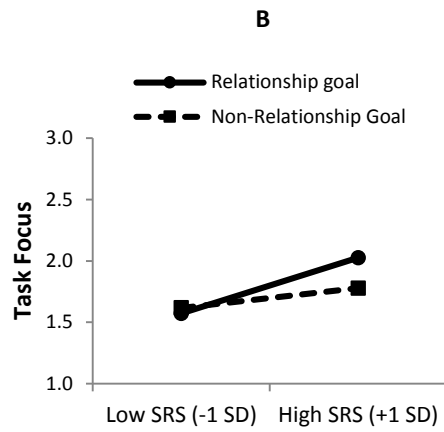
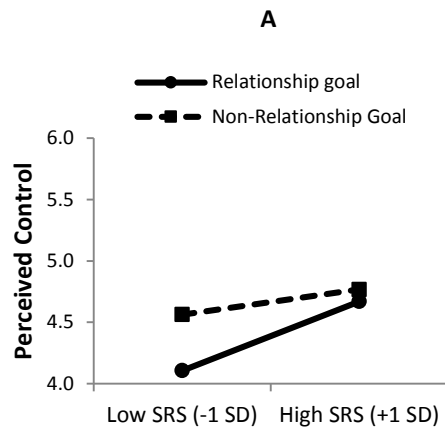
*Supplementary Table 2.* Study 1: Descriptive Information and Key Statistics from Random-Intercept Dyadic-Process Analyses regarding the Four Facilitators of Self-Regulation.

	Scale	Overall Mean	Within-Person <i>SD</i>	Between-Person <i>SD</i>	M-F RIntercept Cov	<i>p</i>	M-F Residual Cov	<i>p</i>	Auto-correlation	<i>p</i>
Perceived Control	0 to 6	4.60	1.36	0.71	0.04	.394	0.04	.433	0.14	<.001
Goal focus	-3 to +3	1.73	1.64	0.86	0.02	.758	0.02	.828	0.07	.028
Perceived Partner Support	-3 to +3	0.97	1.28	0.88	0.16	.017	0.29	<.001	0.19	<.001
Positive Affect	-3 to +3	1.35	1.19	0.85	0.22	.004	0.29	<.001	0.36	<.001

*Note.* Estimates based on 224 participants from 115 dyads. M = Male; F = Female; RIntercept = Random Intercept.



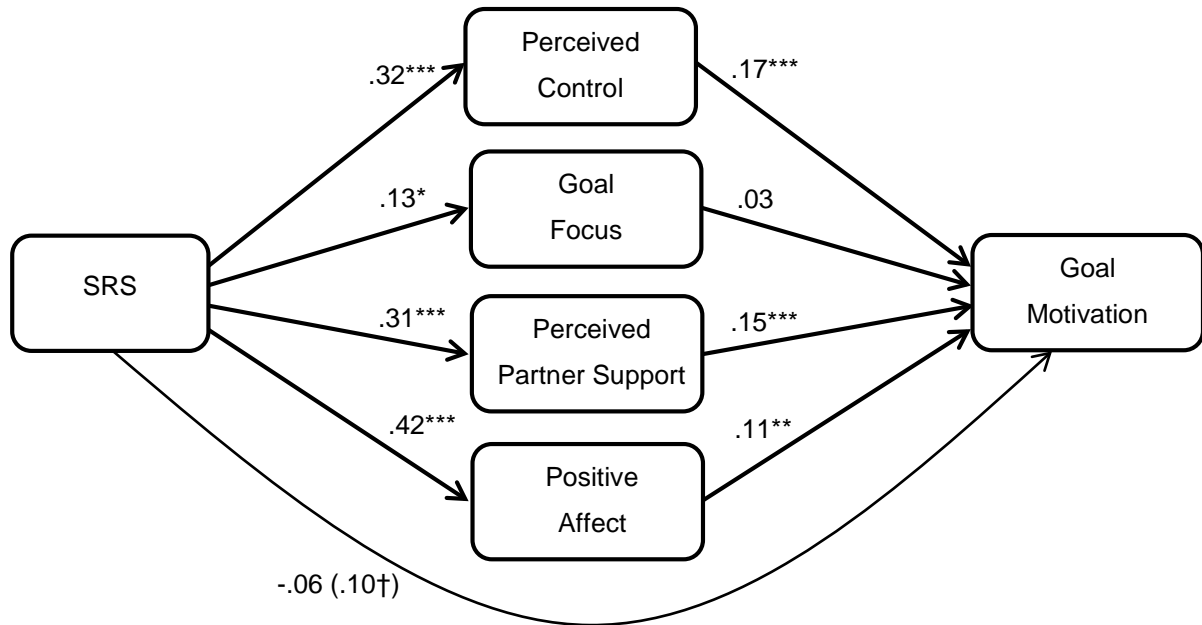
*Supplementary Figure 1.* Study 1: Graphical illustration of within-person fluctuations and between-partner covariation of SRS over time. Each panel represents one of 24 dyads drawn randomly from the dataset. The x-axis of each panel represents the 42 measurement occasions, the y-axis SRS. Male and female partners' SRS scores are plotted in black and red ink, respectively.



*Supplementary Figure 2.* Study 1: Interaction plots of reliable interactions from Table 4.

Predicted scores are plotted for measurement occasions low ( $-1 SD$ ) and high ( $+1 SD$ ) in SRS as well as relationship versus non-relationship goals (panels A to D), partner presence versus partner absence (panels E and F), and low ( $-1 SD$ ) versus high ( $+1 SD$ ) relationship duration (panels G and H).





*Supplementary Figure 3.* Study 2: Summary of mediation analysis showing how the transmission of the total indirect effect of SRS on goal motivation through perceived control, goal focus, perceived partner support, and positive affect. Coefficients represent unstandardized effects.