LINKING RELATIONSHIP QUALITY TO PERCEIVED MUTUALITY OF RELATIONSHIP GOALS AND PERCEIVED GOAL PROGRESS

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Two goal-related variables were examined as predictors of relationship quality. One was the perception of mutuality of goals held for the relationship; the other was the perception of progress regarding those relationship goals. A mediation model was considered whereby relationship goal mutuality predicted quality via perception of goal progress. Study 1 examined cross-sectional associations among these variables in 245 dating participants. Results of a path analysis (controlling for effects of relationship conflict) were consistent with the mediation model. Study 2 replicated these findings in a sample of 78 committed romantic couples, using an electronic diary methodology to gather data from both partners about relationship quality across multiple time points. Study 2 also extended the findings by examining a dyadic mediation model with both mediated actor effects and mediated partner effects. Findings suggest a central role for shared relationship goals and for perceptions of relationship goal progress in the context of romantic relationships.

It is common to conceptualize human behavior in terms of goals. A goal is an internal representation of a desired outcome, event, or process (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Holding and attaining meaningful life goals relates to psychological well-being (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Emmons & Diener, 1986; Emmons & King, 1988; Little, 1983; Palys & Little, 1983; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Srull & Wyer, 1986; Wessman & Ricks, 1966; Wright & Brehm, 1989). Many of the goals that guide human behavior pertain to initiating and maintaining close relationships (Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Furthermore, some of the goals in close relationships are shared with one's partner. Although most of the goal literature focuses on the personal goals of particular individuals, and how those goals relate to individual well-being, the work reported here shifts that focus to shared goals in romantic relationships.

GOALS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

The idea that goals are important in romantic relationships is not new. For example, Burr (1976) argued that marital success hinges on achieving communication and decision-making goals. Fowers (2000) suggested that marital stability and quality depend upon the partners' sharing meaningful goals and making progress regarding those shared goals. More recently, Gottman (1999) has highlighted the importance of supporting one another's personal goals, or "honoring each other's dreams." Also fitting this picture, Fincham and Beach (1999) conceptualized marital conflict as stemming from having defensive individual goals (e.g., protecting self-esteem) that undermine intentions to communicate and solve problems jointly.

Studies of *how* aspects of relationship goals relate to relationship outcomes are also emerging. In one study, simply endorsing intimacy goals in one's relationship related to global relationship evaluations (Sanderson & Cantor, 1997). Another, more complex study examined effects of partner support for personal and relationship goals (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996, Study 1). Among dating couples, receiving partner support for individual and relationship goals predicted higher relationship satisfaction 4 weeks later. Furthermore, it appeared that reports of receiving support from one's partner related to subsequent relationship satisfac-

tion because partner support was being translated into more goal progress. Also, the effects were present even when controlling for initial relationship mood. A follow-up cross-sectional study of a married sample (Brunstein et al., 1996, Study 2) did not test a corresponding mediation model, but it found that men's satisfaction with their marriage depended heavily on receiving support for individual goals outside the relationship, whereas women's marital satisfaction related more strongly to support for relationship goals.

In related work, Kaplan and Maddux (2002) examined marital support for personal goals and collective efficacy perceptions for shared goals (i.e., a spouse's belief that the *couple* is capable of accomplishing its shared goals). This cross-sectional study found that a spouse's sense of collective efficacy for shared goals related to marital satisfaction, above and beyond the effect of spousal support for personal goals.

In the personal goal literature, well-being has been related to several qualities pertaining to goals. Examples include goal content (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000), goal motivation (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001), goal integration (Sheldon & Emmons, 1995), goal commitment, goal attainability, and goal progress (Brunstein, 1993). A nascent literature on close relationships is exploring similar characteristics of relationship goals, including goal salience, goal support, goal enactment, and goal similarity (Broemer, 2001; Brunstein et al., 1996; Cole & Teboul, 2004; Kaplan & Maddux, 2002). In the work reported here we focus on two goal-related characteristics: the perceived *sharing* of relationship goals and perceived *progress* toward relationship goals.

SHARING OF RELATIONSHIP GOALS

Empirical evidence indicates that similarities between relationship partners in values and interests (which often determine goals) relate to relationship stability (e.g., Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976). Marital researchers have also viewed marital conflict as reflecting an underlying dissimilarity between partner goals (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Mutuality of relationship goals may represent an important source of similarity that relates to better relationship quality.

This possibility has in fact been raised by a number of people. Sternberg, Hojjat, and Barnes (2001) argued that similarity between

partners' ideal visions of love helps relationships succeed. They speculated that all persons possess idiosyncratic visions of "love-as-a-story" that is game-based, religion-based, fantasy-based, etc. They argue that people strive to act out these visions (as complex relationship goals) and experience relationship distress or failure when their visions are not compatible with those of their partner. Using a different line of reasoning, Cole and Teboul (2004) noted that partners' pursuit of shared goals entails teamwork in the form of joint activity, shared interests, and mutual knowledge.

Some evidence is consistent with the idea that goal mutuality relates to better relational outcomes. Classic research shows that between-group conflict decreases when groups develop common goals that necessitate cooperation (Sherif, 1958). A similar link has been demonstrated in marriage research. In one study (Buehlman, Gottman, & Katz, 1992), use of "we-ness" in an interview correlated strongly with both subjective and objective indicators of relationship quality and lower incidence of divorce over time. In that case, marital outcomes were predicted by use of language indicative of a collective identity (which presumably implies mutual goals). The idea that use of the word "we" reflects interpersonal closeness has also received empirical support from other sources (e.g., Fitzsimons & Kay, 2004).

PERCEPTIONS OF GOAL PROGRESS

Another contributor to well-being is the perception of progress toward the attainment of goals. That is, people experience positive feelings when their progress toward goals exceeds expectations, and negative feelings when progress falls short of expectations (Carver & Scheier, 1998, 1999). Empirical evidence consistent with this idea as it pertains to personal goals has been reported in several articles (e.g., Affleck, Tennen, Urrows, Higgins, Abeles, et al., 1998; Brunstein, 1993; Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Lawrence, Carver, & Scheier, 2002).

The notion of goal progress has also been applied more specifically to relationship goals. Baumeister and Bratslavsky (1999) reviewed indirect evidence suggesting that rapid increases in intimacy induce positive, relationship-specific emotions such as passion. Karney and Frye (2002) found that married partners base their judg-

ments of satisfaction with their relationship more on perceptions of recent improvements than on the quality of the relationship at that particular time. Laurenceau, Troy, and Carver (2005) also found evidence consistent with the progress notion as applied to relationship goals.

In considering how perceived progress relates to subjective outcomes, it seems important to have an outcome measure that is tied to the nature of the goals. In research on personal goals, mood, or psychological well-being is a typical outcome. In research on professional goals (e.g., Maier & Brunstein, 2001), job satisfaction is a common outcome. It would seem reasonable that when examining shared goals that pertain to a close relationship, the most suitable outcome would be one that is relationship-linked, such as relationship satisfaction, or perceived relationship quality. That strategy was implemented in the work reported here.

A PUTATIVE MEDIATION MODEL

In exploring the role of perceived mutuality and perceived progress, we considered a mediation model: specifically, that sharing of relationship goals would lead to relationship quality by way of perceived progress regarding those goals. As Aron and Aron argue (1986), partners could initially feel motivated to develop shared goals because of the expanded identity that such fusion with one's partner offers. While holding shared goals, couples may be more productive in goal pursuit because they are more likely to be working conjointly.

Furthermore, a partner may feel additional motivation to invest in goal pursuit when both partners benefit from the same efforts. A handful of scattered findings are consistent with this view. For example, there is evidence that if a person's strategies for attaining different goals overlap, pursuing one goal facilitates progress toward another goal (Riediger & Freund, 2004). This suggests how the perception of goal mutuality, once established, could enhance one's sense of progress. That is, the pursuit of a shared goal lets the person "kill two birds with one stone," because it means also pursuing the partner's goal simultaneously, thus enhancing the sense of progress for the couple.

In addition to the hypothesized mediation effects, it is possible that mutuality of goals could also have direct associations with perceptions of relationship quality. We believe there could be some benefits to having a shared sense of direction in life—a sense of communion—that are present regardless of whether progress is made. Some work has identified benefits for partners having a common identity (Buehlman et al., 1992) as well as shared values and interests (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976). To our knowledge, however, no research to date has tested this idea specifically with shared relationship goals.

OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the work reported here, we conducted two studies focused on the perceived sharing of goals and perceived goal progress, and their relations to perceptions of relationship quality. Study 1 examined a sample of individuals in committed, romantic relationships. Study 2 examined a sample of committed, romantic couples using a dyadic design and a daily-diary methodology to obtain relationship quality outcomes. Both studies also included a control for conflict communication, a well-documented determinant of relationship quality (Fincham, 2003; Fincham & Beach, 1999). We included this control because it might be argued that perception of goal progress is simply a proxy for relative lack of conflict. Including relationship conflict in the model would alleviate that concern.

STUDY 1

METHOD

Participants
The sample consisted of 245 undergraduates (176 women) at the University of Miami, all of whom reported currently being in a "committed, romantic relationship." They participated in exchange for credit toward a course requirement. The mean age for men was 19.59 (SD = 1.96, range 18-28), for women 19.20 (SD = 3.15, range 17-42). The sample was culturally diverse: 50.2% European Ameri-

can, 20.0% Hispanic, 8.2% African American, 6.9% Asian or Pacific Islander, 14.7% Other. Most were dating (n = 226), 15 were engaged, and 4 were married; 11 were living with their romantic partner. Participants reported being involved with their partners for an average of 18.67 months (*SD* = 20.65).

MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

Participants completed a set of questionnaires assessing desired and undesired relationship goals, perceptions of partner mutuality of those relationship goals, perceptions of progress toward the relationship goals, relationship conflict, and global relationship quality. As part of an idiographic approach to relationship goal assessment (e.g., Emmons, 1986), participants read the following set of directions (derived from Broemer, 2001):

> Please think carefully about certain desired goals or end-states in your relationship that you would want to come true. It does not matter if such things have occurred or not. Imagine positive things such as having the opportunity for mutual self-disclosure or making your partner feel like a worthy person. Desirable traits of your partner or your own personal goals, such as your careers, are not important in the present context. Please provide 5 desired goals.

A variation on this instruction then was used to elicit undesired relationship goals. Participants were asked to list five desired and five undesired relationship goals/end-states in the empty text boxes presented on the questionnaire below the instruction set.

Most approach (desired) goals provided by participants fell into the categories of desirable relationship feelings, relationship interactions, relationship future, personal behaviors, and partner behaviors. Examples are "I want to learn to validate my partner better," "I want us to get married," and "I want us to have beautiful, healthy children together." Avoidance (undesired) relationship goals included: "I want to avoid being criticized," "I don't want to be ignored," "I don't want us to split up," and "I don't want us to stop having sex."

Goal Mutuality and Progress. After listing their relationship goals, participants completed additional items. To assess perceived goal mutuality, participants were asked: "How much do you think your partner shares these goals?" They responded on a single 7-point scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much so*) regarding the set of desired relationship goals produced. They were also asked, regarding the set of undesired relationship goals: "How much do you think your partner also wants to avoid these undesirable outcomes?" on a 7-point scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much so*). The approach and avoidance items were averaged to yield a composite measure of perceived partner mutuality for relationship goals ($r = .41$, $p <$ .001).[1]

To assess perceived progress regarding desired relationship goals, participants were asked: "How well are you and your partner working together toward these goals?" They responded on a 7-point scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much so*). To assess perceived progress for undesired relationship goals, participants were also asked: "How well are you and your partner working together to avoid these undesired end-states?" Approach and avoidance goal progress items were averaged to yield a composite measure of perceived relationship goal progress ($r = .71$, $p < .001$).[2]

Perceived Relationship Quality. Relationship quality was assessed with the 18-item measure of Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). Items instructed participants to rate feelings about their relationship and relationship partner regarding satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Extremely*). Higher scores in the PRQC represent higher perceived relationship quality. The alpha reliability coefficient for this measure was .95.

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1. In many contexts it is very important to distinguish approach tendencies from avoidance tendencies (e.g., Carver, 2004; Laurenceau et al., 2005). We did not do so here for the following reason. Theoretically, the outcome measure (i.e., perceived relationship quality) integrates elements reflecting both approach and avoidance tendencies. Thus, we expected similar patterns across the two classes of goals. Indeed, conducting separate approach and avoidance analyses did yield similar patterns of findings. For simplicity, we report only the combined analyses here.

2. As with mutuality, we expected similar patterns for progress in approach and avoidance goals. Again, separate approach and avoidance analyses yielded similar patterns of findings, so for simplicity we report only the combined analyses.

TABLE 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study 1 Variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1. Sharing	—			
2. Progress	.78**	—		
3. Conflict	-.34**	-.39**	—	
4. PRQC	.59**	.71**	-.36**	—
M	5.55	5.04	31.02	5.82
SD	1.33	1.55	12.41	1.02

Note. Sharing = Perceptions that the partner shares the participant's relationship goals; Progress = Perceived progress regarding relationship goals; Conflict = Relationship conflict from Communication Patterns Questionnaire; PRQC = Perceived Relationship Quality Components; *N*s for statistics range from 242 to 245; *p < .05; **p < .01.

Relationship Conflict. The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Heavey, 1990) assesses problematic interaction and communication patterns in close relationships. For this study, 8 items tapping demand-withdraw communication, mutual avoidance, and mutual blame rated on 9-point Likert scales (1 = *Very unlikely* to 9 = *Very likely*) were aggregated to form an index of self-reported relationship conflict. Scores ranged from 9 to 72 with higher scores indicating more relationship conflict. Alpha for this scale was .75.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlations of Study 1 variables (along with means and standard deviations) are in Table 1. As predicted, relationship quality correlated significantly with perceived partner goal sharing and perceived goal progress. Also as expected, higher reports of relationship conflict related significantly to lower relationship quality, relationship goal sharing, and perceived goal progress.

Path analyses to assess the proposed mediation model were conducted in Mplus 3.01 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2004). In the text and tables throughout this article, *B*s refer to unstandardized regression coefficients and βs refer to standardized regression coefficients. We tested a model with goal progress mediating the link between perceived goal mutuality and relationship quality and controlled for relationship conflict. Where relevant, model fit was assessed using the χ^2 statistic. As can be seen in Figure 1, perceived goal mutual-
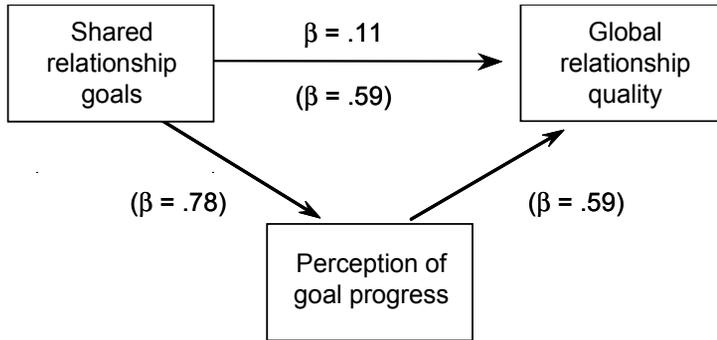
FIGURE 1. (Study 1): Model of perceived relationship goal progress mediating the link between perceived goal mutuality and relationship quality. Effect in parentheses reflects unmediated effect.

ity predicted perceived goal progress (B = .84, SE = .049, β = .73, p < .01). In addition, when relationship quality was regressed on perceived goal mutuality and progress simultaneously, perceived progress emerged as a significant predictor (B = .39, SE = .048, β = .59, p < .01), and the effect of perceived goal mutuality dropped to nonsignificance (B = .08, SE = .06, β = .10, ns). This suggests that perception of progress mediated the link between perceived goal mutuality and relationship quality. It should be noted that these effects are above and beyond the links from relationship conflict to relationship quality (B = -.01, SE = .004, β = -.09, p < .07) and to perceived goal progress (B = -.02, SE = .005, β = -.14, p < .01).

To test for full mediation, the direct path from goal mutuality to relationship quality was constrained to zero, including relationship conflict as a control. This provided one degree of freedom to allow a test of the full mediation model fit. The nonsignificant chi-square indicated that a complete mediation model was consistent with these data, χ^2 (1) = 1.85, p = .17. An additional test of mediation based on the significance of the product of the mediated (indirect) paths using a bootstrapping method (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002; Shrout & Bolger, 2002) confirmed support for a mediation model, *indirect effect* = .39 (SE=.039), p < .001. We also examined a mediation model that included conflict as a second, rival mediator of the link between mutuality and quality. The indirect effect of mutuality through conflict was small but statistically significant, *indirect effect* = .029 (SE=.013), p < .05. Nevertheless, the in-

direct effect of mutuality through progress was considerably larger and statistically significant, *indirect effect* = .39 (SE=.039), *p* < .001.

Because these data are cross-sectional, we were also concerned that alternative models might equally well represent the relations between goal mutuality, goal progress, and relationship quality. Theoretically plausible alternative models can be considered independently, but in the context of cross-sectional data, these models cannot be tested against each other. Comparing the models is not possible because they all have equivalent degrees of freedom and thus are not nested models (MacCallum, Wegener, Uchino, & Fabrigar, 1993). Therefore the global fit of a theoretically plausible alternative model is considered here. One plausible alternative model, for example, could be that goal mutuality would lead to relationship quality, which in turn would lead to goal progress. In other words, a couple's sense that having common future directions could influence satisfaction directly. In addition, perhaps satisfied couples are more likely to make progress with their relationship goals. Although this alternative model cannot be compared to our model, it did not fit these data well when examined in isolation [χ^2 (1) = 121.20, *p* < .0001].

In summary, there was support for the proposed mediation model. Perceptions of relationship goal mutuality and perceptions of relationship goal progress both related to relationship quality, but only progress did so uniquely. Perceived goal progress also mediated the link between relationship goal mutuality and relationship quality. The more that participants felt their partner shared their goals for the relationship, the more progress participants perceived themselves as making regarding those goals, which in turn predicted higher perceptions of relationship quality. Indeed, these data fit a model in which the link between shared goals and relationship quality was accounted for entirely by perceptions of goal progress. Further, the findings were robust to controlling for relationship conflict, a well-documented predictor of relationship quality.

STUDY 2

Study 2 was intended to extend the findings from Study 1 in two ways. First, we used a dyadic design with intact romantic couples. This permitted us to examine both actor and partner effects among

the associations of relationship goal characteristics and relationship quality. Work on interdependence in relationship processes indicates that partners' subjective relationship experiences, including relationship goal characteristics, are often intertwined (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). The interdependence of close relationship outcomes and processes underscores the importance of investigating partner effects. The use of a dyadic design recasts the couple as the unit of analysis, rather than the individual. It thereby allows for examination of links between goal characteristics and *partner* relationship quality as well as *own* relationship quality.

Kashy and Kenny's (2000) actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) lays the foundation for statistical analyses of these kinds of questions. In Study 2, associations between the individual's perceptions of relationship goal sharing and his or her own perception of relationship quality are depicted in Figure 2 and referred to as *actor effects* (i.e., paths c and c'). Associations between one individual's perception of relationship goal sharing and the *partner's* perception of relationship quality are called *partner effects* (i.e., paths f and f'). To test the hypothesis that perceived goal progress mediates the link between perceived goal sharing and relationship quality, *mediated actor effects* and *mediated partner effects* can be examined (see Figure 2). In mediated actor effects, the link between actors' own ratings of goal sharing and their ratings of their own relationship quality would be explained by actor ratings of goal progress (i.e., indirect paths a*b and a'*b') or partner ratings of goal progress (e.g., indirect paths d*e' and d'*e). In mediated partner effects, the link between the actor's perceptions of goal sharing and the partner's relationship quality would be explained by actor ratings of goal progress (e.g., indirect paths a*e' and a'*e) or partner ratings of goal progress (e.g., indirect paths d*b and d'*b'). A dyadic framework is useful for describing, assessing, and testing interdependence of direct and indirect effects among partners' variables.

In addition to examining actor and partner effects for judgments of *global* relationship quality, we also tested the same proposed dyadic mediation effects in a model predicting *daily* relationship quality. We focus on daily relationship quality because of the potential concern that high levels of perceived goal sharing and goal progress might be considered facets of global relationship quality as a construct. For example, a "sentiment override" hypothesis (Weiss, 1980) would argue that positive evaluations of global relationship
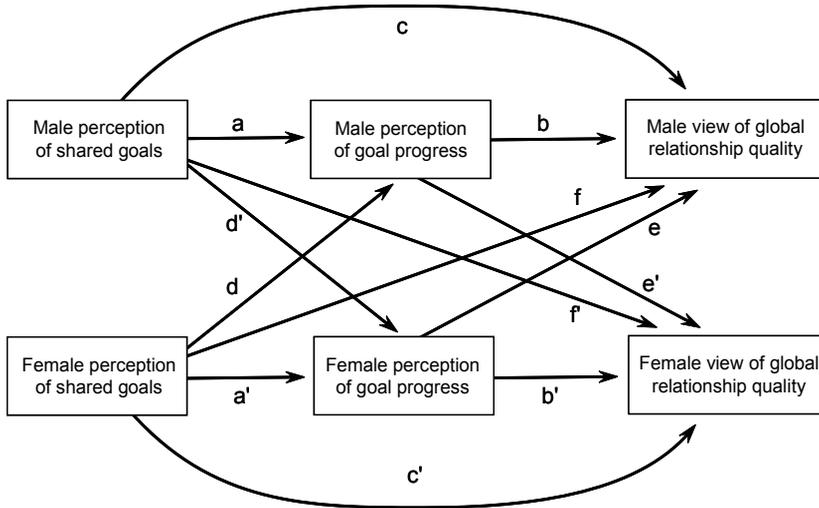
FIGURE 2. (Study 2): Actor and partner effects for dyadic mediation model with global relationship quality as outcome. Estimates constrained the paths for females and males to be equal. Covariances between male and female error terms are estimated but not shown. Path labels are organized by the partner whose outcomes are being predicted.

quality guides evaluations of other more specific relationship-relevant domains (e.g., relationship goal progress). This possibility can be tested by models with daily relationship quality as an outcome, controlling for global relationship quality in addition to relationship conflict. Such a test would allow us to rule out the potential concern that perceptions of relationship goal characteristics are largely redundant with perceptions of relationship quality. In sum, Study 2 added both dyadic and daily-diary design components (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005) to the procedures of Study 1.

METHOD

Participants
The sample for Study 2 included both male and female partners from each of 78 couples at the University of Miami, who identified themselves as being in a committed romantic relationship. They participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Mean age of men was 20.29 (*SD* = 4.95, range 18-55) and mean age of women

19.28 (SD = 3.32, range 17-42). The sample was culturally diverse; 41.0% European America American, 33.3% Hispanic, 3.8% African American, 6.4% Asian Pacific Islander, 0.6% Native American,14.7% Other. Most couples were dating (n = 74), 2 were engaged, and 2 were married; 5 couples were living together. Participants reported being involved with their romantic partners for an average of 8.49 months (SD = 6.49).

Materials and Procedure

As in Study 1, participants ideographically listed their approach (desired) and avoidance (undesired) relationship goals and rated their perceptions of mutuality and progress regarding those goals. Ratings of approach and avoidance goal sharing were averaged to yield a sharing index for women (r = .41, p < .01) and men (r = .37, p < .01). Approach and avoidance goal progress items were averaged to yield a progress index for women (r = .62, p < .01) and men (r =.55, p < .01). The PRQC (Fletcher et al., 2000) was again used to assess overall perceptions of relationship quality (alpha = .94 for women, .95 for men). The CPQ (Christensen & Heavey, 1990) was again used to assess relationship conflict (alpha = .72 for women, .78 for men).

   In addition to these global measures, each male and female partner from every couple was provided with a personal digital assistant. Participants were told that the study would include daily recording of their relationship experiences, twice a day, for 10 consecutive days—once in the morning approximately 1 hour after waking and once in the evening approximately 1 hour before going to sleep. Participants were trained in the use of the Experience Sampling Program (ESP; Feldman Barrett, 2000; Feldman Barrett & Barrett, 2001) running on the Palm OS®, which was used for the presentation of the daily diary items. Approximately 85% of the entries fell within the valid daily time intervals for completion of diaries and only valid daily diary data were used in these analyses.

   The ESP program presented a range of questions about the daily experience of the partner, including items tapping relationship quality. A measure of daily relationship quality was constructed by aggregating three diary items, assessing intimacy (At this moment, how much intimacy/connectedness do you feel with your part-

TABLE 2. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Study 2 Variables for Male and Female Partners.

	Female Partners				Male Partners			
	Sharing	Progress	Conflict	PRQC	Sharing	Progress	Conflict	PRQC
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1)	—							
(2)	.62**	—						
(3)	-.32**	-.49*	—					
(4)	.55**	.71**	-.31**	—				
(5)	.25*	.42**	-.27*	.33**	—			
(6)	.33**	.47**	-.34**	.35**	.70**	—		
(7)	-.21	-.33**	.48**	-.22	-.41**	-.46**	—	
(8)	.30**	.59**	-.32**	.62**	.59**	.63**	-.36**	—
M	5.57	5.51	28.95	5.94	5.38	5.30	29.97	5.96
SD	1.21	1.17	11.75	.87	1.20	1.19	12.39	0.88

Note. $N = 78$. Sharing = Sharing of relationship goals; Progress = Progress on relationship goals; Conflict = Relationship conflict from Communication Patterns Questionnaire; PRQC = Perceived relationship quality components; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

ner), closeness (the item Inclusion of Other in the Self; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), and satisfaction (At this moment, how satisfied do you feel in your relationship). Each was recorded on a 7-point scale with higher scores reflecting greater levels of daily relationship quality. Day 1 inter-item reliability for this 3-item composite was .92 for both male and female partners.

RESULTS

Predicting Global Relationship Quality
Correlations among Study 2 variables (along with means and standard deviations) are reported in Table 2. Overall relationship quality related positively to perceived goal sharing and perceived goal progress. Female reports of conflict related negatively to both female and male goal ratings of goal sharing, goal progress, and relationship quality; male reports of conflict related negatively to male goal mutuality, progress, and relationship quality, and to female goal progress.

Using Mplus 3.01 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2004), we evaluated actor and partner effects initially by regressing relationship quality on perceived goal sharing. Models were initially fit by estimating actor and partner effect coefficients separately for male and female partners. Recall that actor effects are defined as associations between actors' perception of goal sharing and his/her *own* relationship quality. Partner effects are defined as associations between actors' perception of relationship goal sharing and their *partners'* relationship quality. It is also important to note that actor effects are always considered in the presence of partner effects, and vice versa (Kashy & Kenny, 2000).

Initial analyses of a dyadic model whereby global relationship quality was regressed on goal mutuality indicated that actor and partner effect coefficients were similar in magnitude across men and women. As a result, we then tested a model where actor and partner effects were constrained to be equivalent across men and women. Moreover, constrained paths increase the power for detecting an effect. This constrained model fit the data very well, χ^2 (2) = 0.40, p = .81, and revealed both significant actor effects, B = .38, β = .53, p < .001, and partner effects, B = .12, β = .17, p < .05. The actor effects were significantly larger than the partner effects, χ^2 (3) = 21.02, p = .0001. These estimated actor and partner effects can also be thought of as total effects to be partitioned into direct and indirect effects in the dyadic mediation analyses that follow.

Mediation of Actor Effects. We first determined that there were significant and unique links to relationship quality both from perceived relationship goal sharing, B =.15, p < .01, and perceived relationship goal progress, B = .45, p < .01, for both men and women when examined simultaneously. Next, we tested the hypothesis that the link between mutuality and relationship quality would be mediated by perceptions of progress. A dyadic mediation model was initially fit estimating path coefficients separately for both male and female partners, but a model that constrained male and female effects to be equivalent was consistent with the data, χ^2 (6) = 8.73, p = .19. Table 3 contains the estimated standardized effects for each constrained pathway in this model.

We focus first on the actor-mediated actor effects. Perceived goal sharing predicted perceived relationship goal progress, B = .76, β = .61, p < .01. When relationship quality was predicted by goal shar-

TABLE 3. Estimated Actor and Partner Effects Predicting Global Relationship Quality in Figure 2 (Paths Are Constrained to be Equal across Male and Female Partners).

Standardized Path Coefficients
Path a: $\beta = 0.61$, $z = 9.25$, $p < .001$
Path b: $\beta = 0.46$, $z = 4.46$, $p < .001$
Path c: $\beta = 0.20$, $z = 2.06$, $p < .05$
Path d: $\beta = 0.21$, $z = 3.46$, $p < .01$
Path e: $\beta = 0.21$, $z = 2.11$, $p < .05$
Path f: $\beta = -0.06$, $z = -0.51$, ns

ing and progress simultaneously, own perceived goal progress remained a significant predictor, $B = .31$, $\beta = .46$, $p < .05$, and the effect of own perceptions of goal sharing dropped significantly, Sobel $z = 4.05$, $p < .01$, but remained statistically significant, $B = .15$, $\beta = .21$, $p < .05$. In other words, actor relationship goal progress partially mediated the link between actor ratings of goal sharing and actor perception of relationship quality. This is an actor-mediated actor effect (i.e., the actor's effect is mediated by the actor's perceptions of progress) and is equivalent to the product of paths a and b (along with a'*b') in Figure 2. Testing the mediated (indirect) path using a bootstrapping method (MacKinnon et al., 2002; Shrout & Bolger, 2002) confirmed support for an actor-mediated actor effect, *indirect effect* = .20, $p < .01$, 95% *CI* = .10, .31.

We also tested for a partner-mediated actor effect (i.e., the actor's outcome is mediated by partner perceptions of relationship goal progress), which is equivalent to the product of paths d' and e (along with d*e'). The partner-mediated actor effect was not statistically significant, *indirect effect* = .03, $p = .12$, 95% *CI* = -.01, .07, suggesting that mediation of the actor effects occurred primarily via the actor's perceptions of relationship goal progress.

Mediation of Partner Effects. In addition to mediated actor effects, there were significant mediated partner effects in the prediction of global relationship quality. Specifically, after including actor and partner perceptions of goal progress as mediators, the partner effects linking an individual's perceptions of goal sharing to the partner's global relationship quality were no longer significant, $B = -.04$, $\beta = -.06$, *ns*. This indicates that the actor's perceived goal progress, the partner's perceived goal progress, or both, fully mediated the

partner effects—that is, the link from an individual's perceptions of goal sharing to the partner's global relationship quality. We next tested which of these variables serves as a mediator (or if both serve that role).

The actor-mediated partner effect (i.e., the effect on the partner's outcome that is mediated by actor perceptions of goal progress) is equivalent to the product of paths a and e' (along with a'*e) in Figure 2. The bootstrapped test of mediation indicated a marginally significant actor-mediated partner effect, Indirect effect = .09, 95% CI = -.01, .19, $p < .07$. We also tested for a partner-mediated partner effect (i.e., an effect on the partner's outcome that is mediated by partner perceived goal progress); this is equivalent to the product of paths d and b (along with d'*b'). The partner-mediated partner effect was statistically significant, *indirect effect* = .07, 95% CI = .01, .13, $p < .05$. Taken together, these findings suggest that the effect of the actor's perception of shared relationship goals on the partner's relationship satisfaction occurred via both actor and partner perceived goal progress.

We then reexamined the proposed mediation model controlling for the effects of relationship conflict. To do this, we included relationship conflict as an additional predictor of both relationship quality and goal progress in the mediation path model for male and female partners. Relationship conflict was a significant predictor of goal progress for both men (B = -.16, β = -.22, $p < .01$) and women (B = -.20, β = -.25, $p < .01$). Even when controlling for relationship conflict, however, the pattern of results described above emerged again, effect sizes were not reduced significantly, and the mediation model was still consistent with the data.

Predicting Average Daily Relationship Quality

The analyses using daily relationship quality as an outcome required the use of a multilevel modeling strategy for dyadic diary data (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). In brief, we conceived of variation in daily relationship quality at two levels: within-couples (level 1) and between couples (level 2). As depicted in Figure 3, we use the notation of Krull and MacKinnon (2001) to indicate that the proposed mediation model is a 2 → 2 →1 model where a level-2 variable (perceived relationship goal shar-
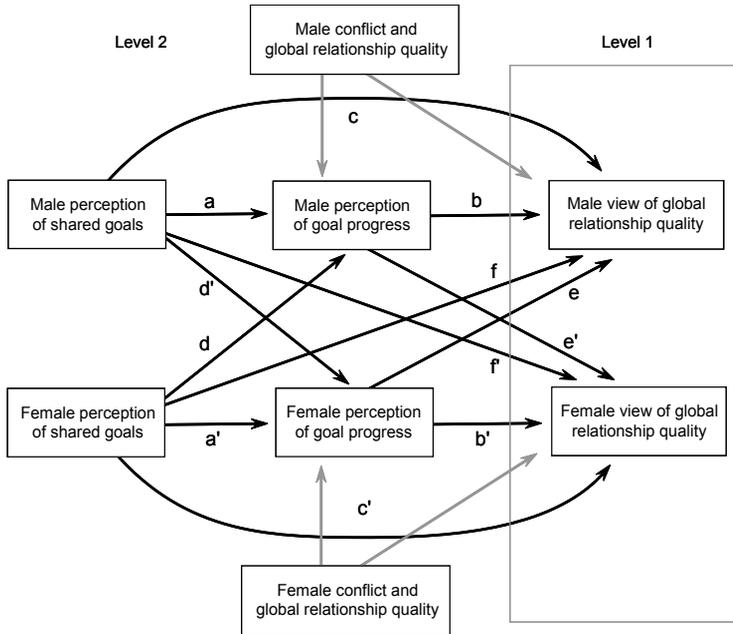
FIGURE 3. (Study 2): Actor and partner effects for dyadic mediation model with daily relationship quality as outcome. Covariances between male and female error terms are estimated but not shown.

ing) is hypothesized to influence another level-2 variable (perceived goal progress) which in turn influences a level-1 variable (daily relationship quality). As suggested by Krull and MacKinnon (2001), multilevel mediation models require that standard errors for effects take into account the nesting structure of these dyadic repeated measures data.[3]

As when modeling global relationship quality above, we first examined a model with actor and partner effects for daily relationship quality regressed on perceptions of shared goals. Because male and female parameter estimates were of similar magnitude, we tested a model where actor and partner effects were constrained to be equal across gender and found that it fit the data, χ^2 (2) = 2.57, p = .28. Both actor (B = .25, p < .01) and partner effects (B = .29, p < .001) were significant, indicating that the actor's average daily relation-

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3. Moreover, because it is recommended that coefficients from multilevel models not be standardized (see Willett, Singer, & Martin, 1998), we present unstandardized coefficients for the remainder of this Results section.

TABLE 4. Estimated Actor and Partner Effects Predicting Daily Relationship Quality in Figure 3, Controlling for Relationship Conflict and Global Relationship Quality (Paths Are Constrained to be Equal across Male and Female Partners).

Unstandardized Path Coefficients
$B_a = B_{a'} = .33$ ($SE = .06$), $p < .01$
$B_b = B_{b'} = .26$ ($SE = .09$), $p < .01$
$B_c = B_{c'} = .04$ ($SE = .09$), ns
$B_d = B_{d'} = .12$ ($SE = .05$), $p < .01$
$B_e = B_{e'} = .28$ ($SE = .09$), $p < .01$
$B_f = B_{f'} = .07$ ($SE = .09$), ns

ship quality was predicted by both actor and partner perceptions of shared goals. We expected that both of these effects would be reduced significantly once perceived goal progress was included as a mediator.

Mediation of Actor Effects. Figure 3 depicts a model in which perceived goal progress mediates the association between perceived goal sharing and daily relationship quality. To rule out the possibility that global relationship quality and relationship conflict might account for the observed actor and partner mediated effects for daily relationship quality, the effects we report below included these variables as covariates. We note that neither relationship conflict nor global relationship quality was a significant predictor of daily relationship quality, once taking into account the other variables in the model. As seen in Table 4, the direct actor effects (c and c') are no longer significant, indicating full mediation. The first leg of the actor-mediated actor effect, the links between perceived goal sharing and perceived goal progress (paths a and a'), was statistically significant. The second leg of the actor-mediated actor effect, the links between perceived goal progress and daily relationship satisfaction (paths b and b'), was also significant. The corresponding Sobel test revealed significant mediation (Sobel $z = 2.58$, $p < .01$).[4]

Turning to the partner-mediated actor effects, the links between actor perceptions of goal sharing and partner perceived goal progress (paths d and d') were significant. The links between partner perceived goal progress and actor daily relationship quality (paths e

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4. Bootstrapped confidence intervals for indirect effects in multilevel models are not readily available in existing multilevel modeling packages.

and e') were also significant. The corresponding Sobel test revealed significant mediation (Sobel $z = 2.50$, $p < .05$). Thus, there is evidence for full mediation of perceived relationship goal mutuality actor effects via both actor and partner perceptions of relationship goal progress, controlling for relationship conflict and global relationship quality.

Mediation of Partner Effects. In addition to mediation of actor effects, there was significant mediation of partner effects for daily relationship quality, controlling for relationship conflict and global relationship quality. Specifically, after including actor perceived goal progress as a mediator, the links between actor perceptions of goal mutuality and partner daily relationship quality are no longer statistically significant effects (paths f and f'). This indicates that perceived goal progress fully mediated these associations. Focusing first on actor-mediated partner effects, the links between perceived goal mutuality and actor perceived goal progress (paths a and a') as well as between actor progress and partner daily relationship quality (paths e and e') were positive and statistically significant. The corresponding Sobel test revealed significant mediation (Sobel z = 2.71, $p < .005$). Focusing next on the partner-mediated partner effects, the links between perceived goal mutuality and partner perceived goal progress (paths d and d') as well as between partner perceived goal progress and partner daily relationship quality (paths b and b') were positive and statistically significant. The corresponding Sobel test revealed marginally significant mediation (Sobel z = 1.87, $p < .07$). Thus, there is evidence for full mediation of perceived goal mutuality partner effects via both actor and partner perceived goal progress, controlling for relationship conflict and global relationship quality.

DISCUSSION

Findings from Study 2 successfully replicated and extended the findings of Study 1 using an independent sample of romantic couples. In this study, perceptions of sharing relationship goals and perceptions of progress were both significantly associated with relationship quality; indeed, each of these variables predicted unique variance in relationship quality. This pattern occurred with both global and daily relationship quality as outcomes. Furthermore,

perceptions of progress with regard to relationship goals partially mediated the link between mutuality of partners' relationship goals and their ratings of relationship quality.

In addition to replicating these Study 1 patterns, the dyadic design in Study 2 allowed us to examine cross-partner effects with these constructs. Individuals' perceptions of relationship goal sharing related both to their own view of relationship quality, and to their partners' view of relationship quality. In addition, these effects were mediated—sometimes partially, sometimes fully—by both actor and partner ratings of goal progress.

Finally, we addressed the possibility that perceptions of relationship goal progress are merely reflections of global relationship quality. We did this by examining daily relationship quality as an outcome and controlling for global assessments of relationship quality. The mediation model still held. As in Study 1, these findings also held after controlling for relationship conflict.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This research had two central aims. The first was to examine associations among the perception that one's partner shares one's own goals for the relationship, the perception of progress with regard to those shared goals, and perceptions of relationship quality. Study 1 found associations among these variables, but only perception of progress predicted relationship quality uniquely. Study 2 replicated associations between relationship quality and the other two variables, and in Study 2 both of those variables uniquely predicted relationship quality. In Study 2, this pattern was replicated with both global and daily relationship quality as outcomes.

As far as we know, these studies are the first to show connections between the perceived quality of a relationship and perceptions of sharing of goals for the relationship. Similarities of various types have been examined in a good deal of research on relationships, but that work focused on other kinds of similarities, such as personality traits or political and religious attitudes (e.g., Watson et al., 2004). Theorists have speculated about the benefits of mutual goals in relationships, but to our knowledge this is the first study to test empirically such an association.

To our knowledge, these studies also represent the first empirical attempt to relate relationship quality to perceptions of progress with respect to relationship goals. As seen in the broader personality and goals literatures, perceptions of goal progress is important for subjective outcomes including feelings of well-being (Carver & Scheier, 1998, 1999; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Other studies support the idea that people experience positive feelings when moving toward their goals at a relatively high pace and negative feelings when falling short of expectations (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Lawrence et al., 2002). This pattern has also been found with social-interpersonal goals and mood ratings in a clinical population (Affleck et al., 1998) and with perceived changes in intimacy, conflict levels, and affect (Laurenceau et al., 2005). However, the studies reported here are the first to examine such patterns with ideographically-assessed shared relationship goals and perceptions of the quality of the relationship.

The final aim of this research was to test the possibility that perceptions of relationship goal progress would mediate associations between the other variables. In Study 1, progress fully mediated the link between perceived sharing of relationship goals and relationship quality. In Study 2, perceived progress partially mediated the link between perceived sharing of relationship goals and relationship quality. These findings are consistent with our conceptualization in which mutuality of relationship goals facilitates relationship coordination and functioning (i.e., progress with relationship goals), thereby generating higher relationship quality. Such a conceptualization recasts mutuality between partners' goals as a variable that fosters goal progress. Goal progress, in turn, functions as the more proximal predictor of the subjective relationship outcome.

An additional contribution of this work (Study 2) was methodological: use of the APIM to examine these dyadic data. This methodological approach afforded the benefit of assessing interdependence between partners with regard to the constructs under study. Using this modeling approach, we found evidence of interdependence: individuals' perceptions of relationship quality related not only to their own perceptions of relationship goal sharing but also to their partners' ratings of relationship goal sharing. Additionally, relationship quality is determined not only by an individual's own ratings of relationship goal progress, but also by the partner's ratings of goal progress. Moreover, we extended the typical use of the

APIM by examining the proposed mediation model within a dyadic context. The effect of an actor's perception of shared relationship goals on actor relationship quality occurred via actor perceived goal progress (i.e., an actor-mediated actor effect); the effect of an actor's perception of shared goals on the partner's relationship quality occurred via both actor and partner perceived goal progress (i.e., both actor- and partner-mediated partner effects).

The significant direct and indirect partner effects suggest interdependence with regard to these constructs. In other words, both actor and partner relationship goal characteristics contribute to the actor's view of relationship quality and examining either view in isolation would be misleading. This is consistent with characterizations of interdependence in relationship processes (Kelley et al., 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), and suggests that partners' experiences regarding relationship goals and quality are similarly intertwined.

In both studies, we also addressed important potential methodological confounds. First, we controlled for the effects of relationship conflict in both Studies 1 and 2. It is important to note that conflict is a widely used predictor of relationship quality (Fincham & Beach, 1999). In both studies, the findings held when controlling for relationship conflict. Although relationship conflict displayed significant zero-order associations with relationship quality in these studies, progress regarding relationship goals related significantly to relationship quality above and beyond the effect of conflict.

Second, in Study 2 we were also able to control for the global sense of relationship quality when examining daily relationship quality as our outcome. Documenting a link between progress and daily relationship quality in this way confirms that perceptions of progress with relationship goals are not merely an epiphenomenon of global relationship quality.

Despite finding support for our central hypotheses, we should also note some potential limitations. First, it would have been desirable to supplement self-reports of perceived goal characteristics with more objective measures. For example, it is possible that individuals don't accurately perceive the level of mutuality in their and their partners' goals. We believe, however, that in dealing with the sort of subjective outcomes measured in this study, the more relevant predictor would be the individuals' subjective perceptions. Future replications could benefit, nonetheless, from comparing sub-

jective and objective measures of goal characteristics such as mutuality and progress.

A second limitation is that these studies used relatively young participants in dating relationships. To improve generalizability, future studies should examine relationships of longer length and greater commitment, such as marriages. Furthermore, testing our hypotheses longitudinally would augment our cross-sectional methodology. Specifically, this would enable testing alternative models and would help in considering causal links.

In conclusion, however, our findings point to a central role for goals in the context of romantic relationships. Both theory and the findings reported here suggest that perceived progress toward relationship goals is a particularly important influence on relationship quality. We believe that goal-based constructs will continue to be a fruitful direction for understanding close relationship outcomes and processes, beyond traditional indicators of relationship functioning, such as conflict.

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