“Let’s Have a Date Night!”: The Role of Approach Relationship Goals in Self-Expanding
Relationship Activities

by

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APPROACH GOALS AND SELF-EXPANDING ACTIVITIES

Abstract

The goal of the present research was to examine how approach relationship goals shape shared activity planning and engagement. I predicted that people higher in approach relationship goals will be more likely to plan and engage in self-expanding (i.e., novel, exciting, and creative) shared partner activities. In a two-part study, one hundred and thirty-five primarily dating student participants first planned a date to engage in with their partner, and were instructed to engage in the date during the next six days. One week later, participants completed a follow-up questionnaire about the enacted date. People higher in approach relationship goals engaged in shared partner activities that were significantly more self-expanding (i.e., creative and exciting), and desired to participate in these activities more frequently in their relationship. Thus, people higher in approach goals are more dedicated and committed to the dates they plan and engage in, believe their partner will be interested in the date they plan, and have a greater desire to participate in future self-expanding dates. These findings suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals are more adept at planning growth-enhancing time with their partners over the course of their romantic relationships.

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“Let’s Have a Date Night!”: The Role of Approach Relationship Goals in Self-Expanding Relationship Activities

The beginning stages of romantic relationships are a time for joy, excitement, and positive emotion, commonly referred to as the “honeymoon stage”; however, over time people’s excitement with their relationship begins to decline (Aron & Aron 1986, 1996). One way of combatting this decline, and of preventing boredom throughout the relationship, is by engaging in exciting activities over the course of the relationship (Aron, Norman, & Aron, 2001; see Aron, Lewandowski Jr., Mashek, & Aron., 2013 for a review). However, some people might be more adept at planning exciting activities with their partners than others. For example, if Elizabeth were to plan a date with her partner, would she engage in an activity that was familiar and typical for them (e.g., watching their favourite show on Netflix), or would she plan a new, creative, and exciting adventure (e.g., skydiving)? The goal of the present research was to examine individual differences in people’s relationship motivations and how this relates to the quality of the dates that they plan within their relationship.

Earlier relationship maintenance research focused on aversive properties (i.e., negative and punishing experiences such as conflict, jealousy, lies, and betrayal) and how best to remove or reduce them (e.g. Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; Fleischmann, Spitzberg, Andersen, & Roesch, 2005; Gottman, 1994; Kim et al., 2015). Scholars have since shifted their focus to highlight the appetitive (i.e., reward-related) aspects of romantic relationships that couples can maintain (Gable & Reis, 2001). Whereas the aversive side of relationships focuses on negative features, appetitive properties focus on the qualities of relationships that promote positive experiences and

positive affect (Gable & Reis, 2001). For instance, researchers have focused on positive maintenance processes such as responding positively to partner experiences (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Langston, 1994), expressing gratitude (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010), responsiveness to emotional disclosures (Gable, Gonzaga, Strachman, 2006), and emotional and sexual intimacy (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day, & Gangamma, 2014). One appetitive maintenance process that is gaining empirical evidence is enhancing the sense of self through exciting shared partner activities over the course of the relationship (Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996).

Self-Expansion in Romantic Relationships

Aron and Aron (1986) developed the self-expansion model of motivation to describe how couples can continue to achieve growth throughout their relationship. Within this model, they posit that people actively seek to expand their sense of the self by seeking out experiences that are novel and exciting (Aron & Aron, 1996). Through these novel and exciting experiences, the self-expansion model posits that people are motivated towards developing new perspectives, identities, and resources that increase their personal self-efficacy (Aron et al., 2013). That is, people are motivated to increase their self-efficacy and accomplish goals, and one way of expanding the self is by including their partner in their sense of the self (Xu, Lewandowski Jr., & Aron, 2016). In the beginning of the relationship, people self-expand at a very high rate due to the new resources and skills from their partners that they incorporate into their sense of self, as well as the positive aspects of their partners that they begin to elaborate into their self-concept (Aron, Aron & Norman, 2004; Aron et al., 2001; Strong & Aron, 2006;). For example, if Brad and Madison started dating, Madison may begin to incorporate Brad's

love of the outdoors into her own identity. When partners become interdependent, they begin to feel as though their senses of selves are intertwined or overlapping, thus incorporating new resources and identities obtained from one's partner into one's own self-identity (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). This overlap, referred to as *inclusion of the other in the self*, leads people to feel that their partner's experiences are part of their own, thus allowing them to gain access to new skills, knowledge, and resources (Agnew et al., 1998; Aron et al., 2013). However, as relationships continue to develop over time, there are fewer opportunities for gaining new perspectives and resources from one's partner, often resulting in feelings of boredom within the relationship (Aron et al., 2004). Therefore, while including one's partner in the self is one component of self-expansion, another method of achieving self-expansion throughout the relationship involves engaging in novel and exciting activities with a partner (Aron et al., 2000; Aron & Aron, 1986).

Benefits of Self-Expanding Shared Activities

In the beginning stages of romantic relationships, couples self-expand at a high rate due to the new information being learned about the partner and the self through novel experiences and conversations (Aron et al., 2001; Strong & Aron, 2006). However, over the course of the relationship, opportunities to learn new things about one's partner begin to decline, leading to a decrease in opportunities for self-expansion, and increases in boredom over time (Aron et al., 2004; Tsapelas, Aron, & Orbach, 2009). As such, one way to combat a decrease in self-expansion, and increase in boredom, within the relationship is to continue to engage in shared self-expanding activities throughout the relationship. As simply spending time together is not sufficient for increasing relationship

satisfaction (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993), self-expansion scholars predict that engaging in self-expanding activities (i.e., those which are novel and exciting) facilitates increased relationship satisfaction, commitment, duration, and overall positive affect over time (Aron et al., 2000; Graham, 2008; Lewandowski & Aron, 2004).

Lab studies. To explore the effect of self-expanding activities on relationship quality, Aron and colleagues (2000) conducted a series of laboratory studies where they asked participants to participate in seven-minute activities that were either novel, challenging, and arousing (i.e., self-expanding), or mundane and pleasant. The self-expanding activity consisted of a series of obstacles that couples had to traverse while bound together by their wrist and ankle, and participants were told that they had to complete the course in less than one minute (Aron et al., 2000). In contrast to this physiologically arousing task, in the mundane condition, participants were required to repeatedly roll a ball back and forth into the middle of the gym for seven minutes. Following participants' activities, couples in the self-expanding condition reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction. In addition to this reported increase in relationship satisfaction, through videotaping couples' interactions throughout the study, they also found that couples who engaged in a self-expanding activity were more supportive of each other during and after the activity (Aron et al., 2000). This demonstrated the positive influence of engaging in short, self-expanding activities, upon relationship satisfaction and positive relationship interactions. In another laboratory study, Graham and Harf (2014), explored additional characteristics of self-expanding activities, including the level of challenge of the activity, and the couples' skill level. Participants were given either a low, medium or high self-expanding task (operationally

defined in terms of the level of challenge) to complete with their partner during a ten-minute time limit. In doing so, they found that the relation between the level of self-expansion of the activity and reported relationship quality depended on the skill level of the partners. In other words, a more self-expanding activity was more related to increases in relationship satisfaction when the couple's skill level matched their level of the challenge of the activity. When the level of challenge exceeded the skill of participants, this was related to negative affect and decreases in relationship quality (Graham & Harf, 2014). However, although these studies suggested that self-expanding activities increase relationship satisfaction, the activities did not represent typical relationship activities (i.e., low ecological validity).

Homework-style studies. To address ecological validity concerns, researchers devised homework-style study designs where couples were instructed to engage in specific types of dates over a period of time. For instance, Reissman and colleagues (1993) assigned couples to participate in either exciting, pleasant, or no activities over a ten-week period. Results suggested that those who engaged in short, novel and arousing, activities, reported significantly higher relationship satisfaction compared to those who participated in pleasant, or no, activities (Reissman et al., 1993). For example, if a couple participated in a salsa dancing class, this new and challenging activity would bring them increased relationship satisfaction. In an extension of this research, Coulter and Malouff (2014) investigated whether the increases in relationship satisfaction that couples experience after participating in self-expanding activities are enduring over time. Consistent with previous research, they instructed participants to either engage in self-expanding (i.e., exciting) activities, or remain on a "waiting list" (i.e., no activity). The

results supported past findings that when couples engaged in self-expanding activities, they experienced significantly enhanced relationship satisfaction, as well as increased positive affect, compared to those who did not engage in any activities (Coulter & Malouff, 2014). In addition to these findings, they also found that these positive effects on relationship satisfaction appeared to endure after a four-month follow-up. This provides support to suggest that participating in self-expanding (versus pleasant or mundane) activities with one's partner can facilitate lasting increases in relationship satisfaction. However, it is important to note that while this existing research provides support for the engagement of self-expanding shared activities, and increases the ecological validity with couples choosing their everyday activities, the context of these studies is experimental in nature. That is, within these homework-style studies, researchers still manipulated the types of activities that participants engaged in (i.e., self-expanding versus non-self-expanding).

Experiential sampling studies. Very few studies have explored the activities that couples choose to engage in within the context of their everyday lives without experimenter manipulation. With exception, Graham (2008) used the experience sampling method to explore the extent to which couple's daily activities are self-expanding. Through signaling partners at random times during their day over the course of one week, partners reported on their relationship activities, relationship satisfaction, and affective experiences, allowing responses to be based on people's immediate natural experience (Graham, 2008). Findings suggested that when people engaged in partner activities that were more self-expanding (i.e., exciting, active, arousing) within their daily lives, they felt more satisfied with their relationship and closer to their partner (Graham,

2008). Further, Graham and Harf (2014; Study 5) also explored self-expanding activities within couples' daily relationships using the experience sampling method. For one week, participants were signaled randomly throughout the day, and were asked to report on their relationship activities, relationship satisfaction, and mood. Their findings suggested that the level of challenge of the activity, as well as partners' skill levels, were important factors in determining increases in relationship quality due to self-expansion. As such, activities that were too challenging, and that extended beyond the partners' skill abilities, resulted in more negative affect and less relationship satisfaction (Graham & Harf, 2014). However, they found that the increases in relationship satisfaction experienced within their experience sampling study to be much weaker than when the activity was specifically manipulated to be challenging (e.g., low, medium, or high level of challenge; Graham & Harf, 2014). As this research represents some of the few studies which explore the content of couples' activities within their day-to-day lives, more research is still needed to explore couples' shared activities outside of the experimental context, including a focus on the quality and content of these activities, and the effect on relationship satisfaction.

Limitations of Self-Expanding Shared Activities

Although self-expansion elicits many benefits for couples in their romantic relationships, further research has also explored possible limitations, for both oneself and one's relationship, that may arise when participating in self-expanding activities. For instance, Burris and colleagues (2013) found that self-expansion that occurs without considering the perspective and well-being of one's partner can be unhealthy for both oneself and one's relationship (Burris, Rempel, Munteanu, & Therrien, 2013). In this

research, when people were told to self-expand and develop an identity that was unique to themselves, they were more likely to justify negative and self-serving behaviours (e.g., cheating; Burris et al., 2013). For example, if Erin were to engage in self-expansion without taking into account her partner Steve's interest, she may be more likely to engage in negative behaviours that are novel and exciting for her, such as cheating on Steve with their new neighbour, Billy. They also suggested that in addition to negative behaviours, individual self-expansion without regard for others is also linked to negative traits including narcissism, psychopathy, and greed (Burris et al., 2013). Thus, this represents one limitation of self-expanding activities, when the goal of developing further resources becomes more selfish in nature, and rooted in the goal of developing more resources than those around you (Burris et al., 2013).

When considering the impact of self-expansion on people's sense of self, although the self-expansion model posits that engaging in shared novel activities increases people's self-identity and self-efficacy, research has also shown that when people do not have an existing sense of self-identity, they do not respond as positively to opportunities for self-expansion (Emery, Walsh, & Slotter, 2015). In contrast, people who do not have a clear sense of self are more likely to avoid opportunities for self-expansion, and are not as adept at incorporating the resources gained from others into their sense of self (Emery et al., 2015). Thus, when one person in the relationship lacks their own self-identity, they are not able to include aspects of their partner in their self. For example, if Davis did not have a clear sense of who he was, he would have a difficult time allowing the knowledge he learned from Dee into his own sense of self, thus stunting their ability to achieve growth as a couple. In addition to considering how one's sense of self is an important role

in self-expanding activities, it is also interesting to explore the consequences of a relationship dissolution upon one's sense of self-identity. Research has shown that when couples are more integrated into each other's self-concepts, they experience a much greater loss when their relationship comes to an end (Lewandowski Jr., Aron, Bassis, & Kunak, 2006). When partners engage in more self-expanding activities, and feel a greater sense of overlap with their partner, when a relationship dissolves this leaves both partners feeling a loss of their sense of self. That is, with long-term partners, they may not be able to decipher their own identity from their partners (Mattingly & Lewandowski Jr., 2014b)

Expanding on the negative effects of self-serving self-expansion, and the impact on one's self-identity, Girme and colleagues (2014) explored the effect of shared activities when the purpose for engaging in these activities was to achieve self-expansion. They found that shared relationship activities indeed led partners to feel closer to each other and feel more satisfied; however, the self-expanding properties of shared activities led to higher levels of stress and tension within a relationship, particularly when self-expansion was the *primary motivation* for engaging in such activities (Girme et al., 2014). For example, if Charlie plans a novel date with his partner Jamie, with the purpose of expanding his knowledge of French, if Jamie is not interested in learning French, this will not result in increased relationship satisfaction for either partner. Instead, shared activities should be partner-oriented, involving the dedication and commitment of both partners in the relationship. If one or both partners are not engaged in an activity that is self-expanding, or they are engaging in it with the explicit goal of expanding their sense of self, the activity will not be successful in increasing relationship satisfaction (Girme et al., 2014). Therefore, when considering engaging in activities that are self-expanding

within one's relationship, it is important that both partners are interested in engaging in the activity, and that both partners are dedicated to the activity. This suggests that focusing on the goal of enhancing relationship growth through engaging in shared activities does not increase relationship satisfaction, particularly when the activity does not mesh with the individual goals and desires of either partner.

In addition to considering the motivation for engaging in such activities, the rate and timing of self-expanding activities is also a key contributor towards the success of such activities for partners. When self-expansion occurs too rapidly, or is weighted towards only one partner's goals, self-expanding activities can be detrimental (Aron et al., 2001). That is, if self-expansion occurs faster than a person's ability to integrate these new resources and new knowledge into their sense of self, they will begin to experience distress. Such distress can prevent people from continuing to participate in self-expanding activities with their partner in the future, and can elicit a sense of overwhelm and exhaustion (Aron et al., 2001). Similar effects can also be seen when couples engage in self-expanding activities during a time when they are experiencing a high level of novelty in other areas of their life (Aron et al., 2001). For example, if Kirk and Lynn were in the midst of moving to a new house in a different city, while also preparing for the birth of their first child, engaging in a self-expanding shared activity, such as bungee jumping, would likely lead to increased stress, and would minimize the benefits that they could otherwise experience from such an activity. Thus, engaging in these kinds of new and exciting activities may not be particularly effective in increasing relationship satisfaction when couples are undergoing an excessive amount of novelty in other areas of their life, including periods of transition.

Summary of Self-Expanding Activities in Romantic Relationships

With the self-expansion model positing that couples seek to expand their sense of self through novel and exciting experiences (Aron & Aron, 1996), a variety of studies have found that when couples participate in activities, both in the lab and within their daily lives, they achieve enhanced relationship satisfaction (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Graham, 2008; Reissman et al., 1993). Namely, people who engage in self-expanding activities, compared to pleasant or no activities, feel more satisfied, and closer to their partners over time (e.g., Coulter & Malouff, 2014). However, when participating in self-expanding activities with one's partner, activities should be directed towards the goals of both partners, and should not occur too rapidly or in times of change in other areas of life (Aron et al., 2001; Girme et al., 2014). Altogether it appears that the effects of engaging in self-expanding activities are positive for couples, and continue to encourage growth and satisfaction within the relationship over time.

Although past research surrounding the self-expansion model has suggested that directing people to specifically engage in activities that are self-expanding can result in enduring positive outcomes (Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Reissman et al., 1993), very little research has examined self-expanding activities that occur within the context of peoples' every day relationships (Graham, 2008; Graham & Harf, 2014). That is, *who* is more likely to engage in these self-expanding activities without experimental instructions? Within the present research, I was interested in exploring differences in relationship goals to explore if these individual differences play a role in the dates that partners are planning in their relationships.

Approach and Avoidance Relationship Goals

Motives are defined as energizing and orienting individual behaviours, further directing people toward or away from specific outcomes (Elliot, 1997; Murray, 1938). Within romantic relationships, some people are motivated towards seeking out positive experiences with their partner, whereas others are motivated away from experiencing negative experiences with their partner (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006). More specifically, whereas approach motivation involves the direction of behaviour toward positive stimuli, avoidance motivation involves the direction of behaviour away from negative stimuli (Lewin, 1926 as cited in Elliot et al., 2006). Gray (1991) described approach and avoidance goals using the independent dimensions of the Behavioural Activation System (BAS) and Behavioural Inhibition System (BIS). With the BAS focusing on behaviour motivated towards seeking out rewards, the BIS focuses on behaviours motivated towards reducing punishment (Gray, 1991). Expanding upon these theories into the social domain, Gable (2005) suggested that approach social motives are associated with more positive attitudes towards social relationships, and less loneliness, compared to avoidance social motives. Thus, people who are approach-oriented are more likely to seek out stimulation from their social experiences, and to gain more from these relationships. Correspondingly, approach goals have been positively linked to relationship satisfaction, and the frequency of positive relational events in friendships (Elliot et al., 2006).

In the context of romantic relationships, approach relationship goals are defined as the pursuit of positive experiences within one's relationship, including fun, excitement, and growth (Gable, 2006; Impett et al., 2010). Such goals orient people towards positive

outcomes within their social relationships, resulting in increased satisfaction with life and decreased feelings of loneliness (Elliot et al., 2006; Gable, 2006). People who are higher in approach relationship goals are more focused on pursuing appetitive properties in their relationship, including growth, development, and goal-achievement (Gable, 2006; Gable & Reis, 2001). In contrast, avoidance relationship goals are defined as the aversion of negative experiences in one's relationship, including the avoidance of conflict (Gable, 2006). Whereby approach relationship goals are said to motivate individuals towards growth, avoidance relationship goals are said to motivate people away from rejection (Gable, 2006). For example, if Wayne were higher in approach relationship goals, in the event of a conflict with his partner Christine, he would be more motivated towards reaching a positive compromise that will allow their relationship to flourish. In contrast, if Christine were higher in avoidance relationship goals, she would be more motivated towards reducing the chances of her rejection within their relationship, and may be more likely to avoid the conflict entirely. Although these goals appear to be opposing concepts, it is important to note that both approach and avoidance relationship goals fall on different independent spectrums of each other (Gable, 2006; Impett et al., 2010). In other words, if a person is high in approach relationship goals, this does not necessarily mean that they are also low in avoidance relationship goals.

Relationship Quality and Goals

Approach relationship goals have been positively associated with increased relationship quality and feelings of closeness (Impett et al., 2010). In fact, people who are higher in approach relationship goals demonstrate increases in relationship satisfaction, commitment, and intimacy that continue to increase over time (Impett et al., 2010;

Impett, Peplau & Gable, 2005). For instance, in a daily longitudinal study conducted by Impett and colleagues (2010), they found that people who were higher in approach relationship goals experienced higher relationship satisfaction and closeness to their partners within their everyday lives, as well as more significant increases in relationship quality across a one and three-month period. In comparison, avoidance relationship goals have been negatively associated with relationship satisfaction, and, rather, are related to the greater likelihood of break up within a three-month period (Impett et al., 2010). One reason for this is the way that people who are higher in approach motivation interact with their partners and respond to relationship conflict, including their perception that their partners are more accepting and supportive in the event of relational conflicts (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011).

As people who are higher in approach relationship goals are more likely to seek out rewarding situations, they are also more likely to seek out creative ways to work through difficult times within their personal relationships to reap the benefits of a happy, and intimate, relationship (Gable, 2006; Winterheld & Simpson, 2011). As such, these approach oriented goals motivate people towards increased overall well-being and affiliation with others (Elliot et al., 2006). Moreover, the partners of those who are high in approach relationship goals also report greater satisfaction, closeness, responsiveness, sexual desire and commitment over time compared to partners of individuals lower in approach goals (Impett et al., 2010; Impett, Strachman, Finkel, & Gable, 2008). This effect was particularly strong if *both* couples reported being high in approach relationship goals motivation, as both partners are motivated towards promoting growth and positive experiences within their relationship.

Although this motivation towards positive experiences within the relationship is related to increased relationship well-being (Elliot et al., 2006; Gable, 2006; Impett et al., 2010), the present study further explored if this effect is related to the activities that individuals higher in approach goals are engaging in with their partners. In other words, my goal was to explore if these people are happier in their relationships for reasons apart from simply being higher in positive affect. For instance, what specifically are partners who are higher in approach goals doing within their relationship activities that are leading to increased satisfaction? To date, very little research has explored the specific actions that couples are taking within their lives to facilitate increased satisfaction and closeness.

The Role of Approach Relationship Goals in Self-Expanding Relationship Activities

With the self-expansion model focused on how partners seek out positive experiences to expand their sense of self (Aron & Aron, 1997), it is possible that this model is related to approach relationship goals, whereby people also seek out positive experiences in their relationships. Mattingly, McIntyre, and Lewandowski Jr. (2011) connected the language used within the self-expansion model with such terms used to describe approach motivation: *enhance*, *expand*, *exciting*. With these two concepts, both representing growth-oriented motivation, they examined if a specific type of person (i.e., someone higher in approach motivation) would be more attracted to romantic partners who offered opportunities for self-expansion. Results suggested that people who are higher in approach motivation are more sensitive to opportunities that involve self-expansion, including a greater interest in beginning relationships with partners who offer more opportunities to self-expand (Mattingly, McIntyre, & Lewandowski Jr., 2011). These opportunities include novel resources, new perspectives, and identities that people

feel they can also incorporate into their own sense of self. For example, if Lorenzo was higher in approach motivation, and he felt as though Aidan offered many new and exciting aspects where he could learn more about the world (i.e., Aidan came from a different culture and was interested in the new hobby of wakeboarding), Lorenzo would be more likely to enter, and wish to maintain, a relationship with Aidan. Altogether these findings suggest that self-expansion is positively associated with approach motivation, while unrelated to avoidance motivation. This provides some evidence to suggest that people who are higher in approach motivation are innately more interested in seeking out opportunities that offer self-expansion, including activities that are interesting, novel, and exciting (Mattingly et al., 2011). However, researchers have not yet explored approach relationship goals and self-expanding opportunities over the course of the relationship. That is, no research has explored the *quality* of partners' date activities to identify if individuals higher in approach relationship goals seek out dates that are *more self-expanding* as a way of maintaining their romantic relationships over time. As such, the current research aimed to explore the relationship between approach relationship goals and the planning of, and engagement in, self-expanding relationship activities as a way of achieving growth within one's relationship over time.

Overview and Hypotheses

The present study expanded on the existing relation between approach relationship goals and enhanced relationship quality by exploring whether people who are higher in approach relationship goals are more likely to *plan and engage* in self-expanding activities with their partners. That is, the present research examined the content and quality of dates that people engage in within the context of their everyday

lives (i.e., with their full control over planning the date) and the link with approach relationship goals. There were several objectives of the present investigation. First, I explored the quality and content of shared activities that people who are higher in approach relationship goals *plan* and *engage* in with their partners (vs. people that score lower on approach relationship goals). Second, I explored whether people that were higher in approach relationship goals would be more dedicated and committed to their shared activities in general, and thirdly if they would be more likely to want to engage in similar dates in the future. These findings would suggest that participating in these dates increases people's desire to participate in more dates moving forward, providing another possible explanation for why people higher in approach relationship goals report higher relationship quality (i.e., that they are participating in these dates regularly with their partner). Finally, I examined if people who are higher in approach relationship goals experience increased relationship satisfaction following their shared partner activity. These findings would follow past research, whereby people higher in approach relationship goals expressed increased relationship satisfaction over time (Impett et al., 2010). Similarly, there is overwhelming support to suggest that engaging in self-expanding activities significantly increases relationship quality when measuring from before the activity to after (e.g., Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Reissman et al., 1993). Additionally, I assessed perceptions of the enacted date from the perspective of the partner. This perspective from the partner could provide insight into both sides of the relationship, and provide a deeper understanding of how shared relationship activities are impacting both people in the romantic relationship.

To explore these goals, I asked people to plan a date to participate in with their partner and instructed them to engage in this date over the course of a week. I followed up with participants one week later to assess their enacted date. If participants consented to involving their partner in the study, I also contacted their partner 24 hours following their completion of the follow-up questionnaire.

Hypothesis 1. Self-Expanding Shared Activities

I first predicted that people who are higher in approach relationship goals will *plan* more self-expanding (i.e., novel, creative, and exciting) dates during the initial planning session. Furthermore, I expected that people higher in approach relationship goals will *engage* in dates that are more self-expanding, as reported during the follow-up session. This finding would suggest that approach relationship goals are related to increased motivation towards positive and fun experiences, and the likelihood of seeking out opportunities that offer further opportunities for growth (Gable, 2006; Mattingly et al., 2011). Additionally, I proposed that people who are higher in approach relationship goals experience higher relationship quality due to their participation in more self-expanding activities within the context of their relationship.

Hypothesis 2. Dedication and Commitment to Shared Activities

Second, I predicted that people higher in approach relationship goals will express a greater dedication and commitment to engage in the shared activity with their partner. This would suggest that not only are these dates more self-expanding, but people are more dedicated and committed to being a part of such activities in the context of their relationship. This would enhance our knowledge of why people higher in approach relationship goals are more satisfied, particularly as people who are more committed to

their couple activities feel more satisfied with their partner (Girme et al., 2014).

Similarly, when planned activities are partner-oriented, involving the dedication and commitment of one's partner, this also adds to increased relationship quality (Girme et al., 2014). Thus, I expected that people higher in approach relationship goals will also plan and engage in activities to which they felt their partner will also be more dedicated and committed. This prediction was designed to provide insight into why partners of those higher in approach relationship goals are also more satisfied with their relationships, as approach goal people are overcoming some of the known limitations of engaging in self-expanding activities by consciously considering the interests and goals of their partner (Aron et al., 2001).

Hypothesis 3. Desire for Future Dates

Additionally, I predicted that people who report greater dedication and commitment to their activity, and those who engage in dates that are more self-expanding, will report wanting to engage in more similar dates in the future. In other words, I expected that activities that went well would encourage partners to want to continue engaging in these dates moving forward. I also predicted that people higher in approach relationship goals will express a greater desire to participate in similar future dates. These findings would provide greater insight into the types of activities that people higher in approach relationship goals wish to engage in more frequently within their relationship. With participating in shared relationship activities across time being an important factor in maintaining successful relationships (Aron et al., 2001; Girme et al., 2014), the desire to engage in more self-expanding dates moving forward will provide one explanation for why people higher in approach relationship goals express higher

relationship quality. Namely, that these people intend to continue participating in self-expanding activities within the context of their relationship in the future.¹

Hypothesis 4. Changes in Relationship Quality

Finally, I expected that people higher in approach relationship goals will report increased relationship satisfaction and closeness following their enacted date. Past research has suggested that when shared relationship activities create closeness and intimacy between partners, relationship quality increases (Gable & Reis, 2001; Girme et al., 2014). Additionally, people who are higher in approach relationship goals experience increased relationship quality over time (Impett et al., 2010).

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirty-five participants, recruited via the university online recruitment system (SONA), completed the study (77% females, 23% males). Data were initially collected from 164 participants; however, participants who did not meet the eligibility requirements (i.e., single, long distance, not seeing their partner this week) were removed prior to analyzing the data. In exchange for being a part of the study, participants received 0.5% extra credit towards an undergraduate introductory psychology class and a \$5 Starbucks[®] gift card. To be eligible for participation, participants had to (a) currently be in a romantic relationship (b) be in a geographically close relationship with their partner (i.e., no long distance) and (c) be seeing their partner over the following six days. The mean relationship length for all participants was 21 months (range = 1.5 months to 10 years; $SD = 5.5$ months). Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 50 years old ($M = 21.10$ years, $SD = 5.55$ years).

Procedure and Materials

During an initial online session, participants were first given instructions to plan a date with their partner that they would participate in within the upcoming six days. Then, they assessed the qualities of their planned date and completed measures of relationship quality. One week following the initial planning session, participants completed an online follow-up questionnaire where they assessed their completion of the date, reported on the content of their activity, and completed similar measures of relationship quality. Of the original 135 participants, 106 (79%) completed the follow-up questionnaire. After completing the follow-up session, participants had the opportunity to provide their partner's information for recruit their partner for a follow-up portion to the study. If they wanted to involve their partner in the study, participants also gave a brief description of their date (in one sentence) that was used as a reminder for their partner when contacting them for the follow-up.²

Part 1: Planning a Date.^{3,4} Participants began by describing a date that they could engage in with their partner during the following six days. In contrast to previous studies, I instructed participants that this date could be anything of their choosing, but must be reasonable to engage in during the specified time frame. In other words, participants were not given instructions to manipulate the *type* of activity that they participated in, thus giving them complete freedom to engage in an activity of their choice. Participants also described what motivated them to choose this activity to engage in with their partner (Appendix A). To assess the **self-expanding content** of their planned activity, participants completed measures associated with characteristics of self-expanding activities, including novelty and creativity (Appendix B; Graham & Harf, 2014; Malouff et al., 2012; Reissman et al., 1993). Participants responded to face-valid questions to

determine the extent to which they felt that their planned activity embodied each characteristic of self-expansion from (1) “*Not at all*” to (5) “*Extremely*”. To assess the self-expanding properties of their planned activity more comprehensively, I created a self-expansion composite based upon Lewandowski and Mattingly’s (2014) definition of self-expansion, using the face valid ratings of novelty and creativity⁵. This composite consisted of the most common variables used to define self-expansion (Aron et al., 2000; Aron et al., 2013).

In addition to the content-based questions, I also measured participants’ **dedication and commitment** to their activity based on measures adapted from Girme and colleagues (2014; Appendix C). Participants rated two items for dedication that asked to what extent they wanted to participate in the activity, and what extent they felt their partner would want to engage in the activity. Responses ranged from (1) “*Not at all*” to (7) “*Strong desire to participate*”. Participants also rated two items for commitment that asked them how committed both they and their partner were to participate in the activity, from (1) “*Not committed at all*” to (7) “*Extremely committed*”. In addition to their planned activity, I asked participants a series of questions to assess how many dates they had engaged in over the past week and past month with their partner (Appendix D). Participants rated the **past frequency of dates** on a 5-point Likert scale, from (1) “*Never*” to (5) “*Very often*”.

Individual differences. Participants then completed measures that assessed their individual characteristics. To assess individual differences in relationship goals, I used the **Relationship Goals Measure (RGM)**, consisting of eight items designed to assess individuals’ levels of approach and avoidance relationship goals within their romantic

relationship (Appendix J; Elliot et al., 2006; Impett et al., 2010). To measure participants' levels of approach and avoidance relationship goals prior to engaging in the activity, participants rated statements relating to how they behave within their current romantic relationship on a scale of (1) "*Strongly disagree*" to (7) "*Strongly agree*". Items included "I try to move forward toward growth and development" (*approach relationship goals*), and "I try to avoid getting embarrassed, betrayed, or hurt by my romantic partner" (*avoidance relationship goals*).

Relationship quality. Participants also completed a series of measures to assess their overall relationship quality. Relationship satisfaction was measured using the **Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS)**, a seven-item measure of overall relationship satisfaction (Appendix E; Hendrick, 1988). Participants rated the extent to which the statements corresponded to their romantic relationship on a scale of 1 to 5, including questions such as "How well does your partner meet your needs?" ("*Poorly*" to "*Extremely well*"), and "How good is your relationship compared to most?" ("*Poor*" to "*Excellent*"). In addition to relationship satisfaction, relational boredom was measured using the **Relational Boredom Scale (RBS)**, consisting of items related to boredom and lack of excitement in individuals' relationship (Appendix F; Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2012). Participants identified to what extent a series of 15 items characterized their romantic relationship, including "Dull" and "Exciting" (*reverse scored*), on a scale of (1) "*Not at all true*" to (7) "*Completely true*". Participants then assessed the frequency of boredom in their relationship, based on a 7-point Likert scale, from (1) "*Never*" to (7) "*All the time*". To measure overall relationship self-expansion, I used the 14-item **Self-Expansion Questionnaire (SEQ)** that assessed the extent to which people feel that their

relationship allows them to expand their sense of self (Appendix G; Lewandowski & Aron, 2002). Participants rated statements including “How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?”, and “How much has knowing your partner made you a better person?”, on a scale of (1) “*Not very much*” to (7) “*Very much*”. In addition to overall relational self-expansion, I also measured how close participants felt to their partners using the **Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS)**, Appendix H; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Participants were shown a series of 6 Venn-diagram images, and selected which one best represented how connection they felt to their partner. The degree of overlap in the presented images progressed consistently, whereby the first image presented two circles that appeared fully separate, and the last image presented two circles that were completely overlapped. Finally, participants completed a measure of **Responsiveness** to assess how understood and validated they feel within their romantic relationship (Appendix I; Reis, 2003). Participants responded to a series of 9 items, adapted from the original 18 item scale, that included “My partner sees the real me”, and “My partner understands me”. Participants rated these items on a scale of (1) “*Not at all true*” to (7) “*Completely true*”.

Alternative explanations. In addition to individual differences and relationship goals, I was also interested in identifying if overall levels of **Positive Affect** (i.e., trait positive emotions) were related to approach relationship goals, as well as to people’s date activities and relationship quality. To do so, I also assessed participants’ overall mood using the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Appendix K; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). During the planning session, participants described the extent to which each mood adjective corresponded with how they felt in general during

the previous week, from (1) “*Very slightly or not at all*” to (5) “*Extremely*”. The PANAS was calculated through obtaining the mean of both the positive affect and negative affect subscales. Examples of items from the positive affect subscale included “*enthusiastic*” and “*active*”, whereas examples of items from the negative affect subscale included “*nervous*” and “*afraid*”.

Part 2: Follow-Up to the Planned Date.⁶ One week following their completion of Part 1 of the study, participants received a link via their university email accounts to complete their follow-up session. Mirroring the planning session, during the follow-up session one week following Part 1, participants completed measures to assess their date activity, as well as their relationship quality, and overall affect (Relationship Assessment Scale, Relational Boredom Scale, Self-Expansion Questionnaire, Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale, Positive and Negative Affect Schedule). Activity questions were adapted to focus on their enacted activity, rather than the planned activity. In addition to these measures, participants also completed several new measures to further explore the content of their date.

In the follow-up session, participants began by reporting their level of completion of their planned activity, including when they initially planned the date, who initiated the date, and how involved their partner was in the planning of the date. Participants then completed a short writing task where they described the date that they engaged in, when it occurred, and its duration.⁷ After reflecting on their date, participants then described their motivation for engaging in the date with their partner, and any challenges that they faced during the planning or engagement in their activity (Appendix L).

To measure the excitement that they experienced during their activity, I used the

Four-Factor Romantic Relationship (FFRR) scale, which measures characteristics of romantic relationships on four subscales: excitement, security, care, and stress (Appendix M; Malouff et al., 2012). In the present study, I focused solely on the excitement subscale. Participants rated the extent to which they felt that a series of adjectives were characteristic of their date on a scale of (1) “*Very slightly or not at all*” to (5) “*Extremely*”. In addition to adjectives associated with excitement (e.g., *adventurous*), I also incorporated adjectives associated with novelty (e.g., *different*), and creativity (e.g., *inventive*) into this scale to obtain a greater sense of the self-expanding properties of their enacted date. From these measures, I obtained a mean for the excitement, novelty, and creativity subscales through calculating the mean for the corresponding items. To explore self-expanding properties in the enacted activity, I created a composite through calculating the mean of the FFRR excitement, novelty, and creativity subscales together. Additionally, to identify if engaging in their shared activity resulted in any additional **stress or tension**, participants responded to a face-valid question that asked, “To what extent did engaging in this activity lead to stress and tension in your relationship?” (Girme et al., 2014; Appendix O). Responses ranged from 1 to 7 where 1 represented “*No stress and tension at all*”, and 7 represented “*Extreme stress and tension*”.

Finally, mirroring the planning session where I asked participants to indicate how many dates they had participated in the past week and month, during the follow-up session participants indicated their **desire to participate in similar dates** in the future week and future month (Appendix P). Participants rated how much they would like to engage in similar dates in the next week and month on a scale of 1) “*Not at all*” to 5) “*Very much*”.⁸

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha: Reliability for Scales

Scale	α	
	Planning Session	Follow-Up Session
Approach Relationship Goals	0.87	-
Avoidance Relationship Goals	0.65	-
<i>Responsiveness</i>	<i>0.92</i>	-
Relationship Satisfaction	0.88	0.85
<i>Relational Boredom</i>	<i>0.85</i>	<i>0.94</i>
<i>Relational Self-Expansion</i>	<i>0.93</i>	<i>0.93</i>
<i>Positive Affect</i>	<i>0.88</i>	<i>0.89</i>
<i>Negative Affect</i>	<i>0.87</i>	<i>0.91</i>
Excitement	-	0.81
Novelty	-	0.58
Creativity	-	0.82

Note. A dash indicates that the corresponding scale was not administered during this time point. An alpha reliability > 0.90 indicates excellent internal consistency. 0.80 to 0.90 indicates good, and 0.60 to 0.80 indicates acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). Measures in italics were exploratory in nature within the context of the present research.

Activity coding. To assess the types of activities that participants were planning and engaging in with their partners, activity descriptions from the planning and follow-up sessions were rated by two coders following the completion of the study. The coders categorized each activity based on a series of 14 groups, including “Meal at Home”, “Movie at Theatre”, and “Games” (Appendix Q). Activities were coded according to whether they fit into each individual category with either a 1) “Yes” or 0) “No”. With no restrictions on the date that participants could plan and engage in, several descriptions fell into multiple categories (e.g., dinner and a movie).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to investigating my hypotheses, I was first interested in the types of dates that people planned and engaged in with their partners. The activity descriptions that participants reported during both the planning and follow-up sessions were classified into 14 categories by the lead researcher and one other senior graduate student (through collaborative discussion). As seen in Figure 1, the top five activities during both the planning and follow-up sessions were: going out to eat at a restaurant, going to a movie at the theatre, watching a movie at home, going for a warm beverage (e.g., coffee, tea, hot chocolate), sports (e.g., bowling, mini-putting), and engaging in other activities not listed within the categories. Examples of *Other* activities included “Going to take a picture with Santa,” “Baking cookies together,” and “Giving my partner a massage”. When asked about their partner’s involvement in the planning of the date, 68.3% of participants indicated that they had input from their partner in planning the date and 71.4% indicated that their partner was moderately to extremely involved in planning the date.

Figure 1. Frequency of planned and enacted date activities, as coded by researchers.

Primary Analyses

Hypothesis 1. Are people higher in approach relationship goals planning and engaging in more self-expanding dates? For my first hypothesis, I predicted that people who were higher in approach relationship goals would plan and engage in more self-expanding (i.e., novel, creative, and exciting) activities with their partners. To assess this hypothesis, I explored the correlations between approach relationship goals and the self-expanding properties of the date. During the planning session, there was no significant relation between approach relationship goals and the self-expanding properties of the planned activity, indicating that people higher in approach relationship goals did not *plan* activities that were significantly more self-expanding. However, during the follow-up session, those who were higher in approach relationship goals reported *engaging* in dates that were significantly more self-expanding than those who were lower in approach relationship goals. Table 2 outlines the reported correlations found for the content of both planned and engaged dates.

Table 2

Correlations for Activity Characteristics and Relationship Goals

Scale	Planned Date		Enacted Date	
	Approach	Avoidance	Approach	Avoidance
Exciting	-	-	0.41**	0.12
Creative	0.15	0.11	0.21*	0.15
Novel	0.08	0.10	0.15	0.03
Self-Expanding Composite	0.14	0.13	0.28**	0.14
Pleasant	0.38**	0.11	0.48**	0.17
Positive	0.46**	0.23**	0.53**	0.20*
Challenging	- 0.02	0.07	-0.16	- 0.11
Skilled	0.15	0.11	-0.03	- 0.10
Familiar	0.20*	0.09	-0.02	- 0.05

Note. * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$. A dash indicates that the corresponding scale was not administered during that time point.

With there being a significant correlation between approach and avoidance relationship goals ($r = .44, p < .01$), I was interested in controlling for approach and avoidance relationship goals to explore if the correlations between self-expanding activity characteristics remained consistent within a simultaneous regression equation. The results of the regression equation indicated that the two predictors did not significantly predict *planned* self-expansion ($F(2, 131) = 1.71, p = .19$), but together significantly predicted *enacted* self-expansion ($F(2, 101) = 4.40, p < .05$). Within the enacted date regression equation, I found that approach relationship goals significantly predicted the self-expanding properties of the enacted date, whereas avoidance relationship goals did not (Table 3).

Table 3

Simultaneous Regression for Self-Expanding Characteristics and Relationship Goals

Scale	Planned Date		Enacted Date	
	Approach	Avoidance	Approach	Avoidance
	β	β	β	β
Excitement	-	-	0.37**	- 0.08
Creativity	0.17	0.06	0.17	0.12
Novelty	0.05	0.11	0.17	- 0.05
Self-Expanding Composite	0.11	0.08	0.24*	- 0.00

Note. ** - $p < .01$; * - $p < .05$. A dash indicates that the corresponding scale was not administered during that time point.

Although the main focus of the present research was on self-expanding dates more generally (i.e., a composite), I was also interested in further exploring individual components of self-expanding activities. With the focus of what makes for a self-expanding activity differing amongst scholars (i.e., is it more important for an activity to be *novel*, or *challenging*? (Aron et al., 2000; Graham & Harf, 2014)), I explored whether

the different components of self-expansion significantly contributed to the overall composite. In doing so, I found that approach relationship goals were significantly correlated with engaged dates that were more *exciting and creative*, but, unexpectedly, not more novel (Table 2). The relation between avoidance relationship goals and self-expanding activities was not significant. Interestingly, there was a significantly positive relationship between planned self-expansion and enacted self-expansion ($r = .55, p < .001$), suggesting that when individuals planned dates that were more self-expanding during the planning session, they also engaged in activities that were more self-expanding. There was also a significant relationship between approach relationship goals and the familiarity of the planned date. In other words, people higher in approach goals appeared to plan dates that they felt were more well-known to them, and that they perhaps had experience with in the past. As we did not find a significant relationship between approach relationship goals and novelty, as I had expected, it is possible that in contrast with my prediction, people higher in approach relationship goals plan activities with which are more familiar to them.

Hypothesis 2. Are people higher in approach relationship goals more dedicated to their date activities? For my second hypothesis, I predicted that people higher in approach relationship goals would express greater dedication and commitment to their shared activity with their partner. As predicted, during the planning session, people higher in approach relationship goals reported higher dedication and commitment to their planned activity (Table 4). People higher in avoidance relationship goals were also significantly dedicated and committed to their planned activity; however, Fisher's exact test of independence demonstrated that these relations were stronger for those

higher in approach relationship goals than those higher in avoidance goals ($z = 2.93, p < .01$; $z = 3.92, p < .01$). This suggests that people higher in approach goals are more dedicated and committed to their relationship activities, perhaps providing a reason why they have greater relationship satisfaction.

Table 4

Correlations for Dedication and Commitment

Scale	Approach		Avoidance	
	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Follow-Up</i>	<i>Planning</i>	<i>Follow-Up</i>
Self-Dedication	0.52**	0.43**	0.21*	0.07
Self-Commitment	0.59**	0.49**	0.20*	0.09
Partner Dedication	0.52**	0.46**	0.13	0.11
Partner Commitment	0.56**	0.49**	0.26**	0.05

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

In addition to this, during the initial planning session, people higher in approach relationship goals reported planning dates that they felt their partner would be significantly more dedicated to, whereas people higher in avoidance relationship goals did not present a significant relationship with planned partner dedication (Table 4). Both people high in approach goals, and people high in avoidance goals, planned dates that they felt their partners would be committed to; however, Fisher's exact test of independence showed that this relationship was significantly stronger for individuals higher in approach relationship goals than for those higher in avoidance relationship goals ($z = 3.16, p < .01$). These findings mirror previous findings whereby activities that were partner-oriented led to a more positive experience within shared couple activities (Girme et al., 2014). This orientation towards planning activities that are partner-oriented provides another explanation for why people higher in approach relationship goals, and their partners, are experiencing increased relationship satisfaction.

Also in support of my hypothesis, during the follow-up session, people higher in approach relationship goals also reported significantly higher dedication and commitment to the activity that they engaged in. Similarly, people higher in approach relationship goals also reported that their partners felt significantly more dedicated and committed to the activity that they engaged in, whereas no significant relations existed between partner dedication and commitment and avoidance relationship goals during the enacted date (Table 4). In other words, people higher in approach relationship goals participated in dates where they felt their partner was also highly involved in the date itself, which could be an important factor in their increased feelings of closeness and relationship satisfaction to their partner (Girme et al., 2014). As expected, no significant relations existed between dedication and commitment for avoidance relationship goals within the enacted activity.

I conducted simultaneous regression analyses to explore if the findings for dedication and commitment remained consistent when controlling for both approach and avoidance relationship goals. For planned dates, the regression equation indicated that approach and avoidance goals together significantly predicted dedication ($F(2, 131) = 21.79, p < .001$), and commitment ($F(2, 131) = 33.75, p < .001$). I found that approach relationship goals significantly predicted participants' dedication and commitment to their enacted activity, whereas avoidance relationship goals were not a significant predictor (Table 5). For enacted dates, approach and avoidance goals together significantly predicted dedication ($F(2, 102) = 13.45, p < .001$), and commitment ($F(2, 101) = 18.35, p < .001$). I found that approach relationship goals significantly predicted participants' dedication and commitment to their enacted activity, whereas avoidance

relationship goals were not a significant predictor (Table 5). Additionally, I found similar results for perceived partner dedication and commitment; however, for perceived partner commitment, I found that both approach relationship goals and avoidance relationship goals were significant predictors, with avoidance goals showing a negative relationship with commitment (Table 5).

Table 5

Simultaneous Regression for Dedication, Commitment, and Relationship Goals

Scale	Planned Date		Enacted Date	
	Approach	Avoidance	Approach	Avoidance
	β	β	β	β
Self-Dedication	0.45**	- 0.01	0.51**	- 0.16
Self-Commitment	0.60**	- 0.06	0.60**	- 0.17
Partner Dedication	0.66**	- 0.12	0.59**	- 0.14
Partner Commitment	0.69**	0.02	0.76**	- 0.27*

Note. ** - $p < .01$; * - $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 3. Does engaging in self-expanding activities create a desire to participate in future dates? Next, I predicted that individuals who were more dedicated and committed to their enacted dates, and those whose dates were more self-expanding, would report wanting to engage in more similar dates in the future. To support this prediction, results of Pearson Correlations suggested that people who were more dedicated and committed to their enacted date, as well as those whose activities were more self-expanding, expressed a greater desire to engage in similar dates in the following week (Table 6). In exploring this further, it appears that the dates that were more exciting and creative led to an increased desire to engage in a similar date during the next week, with no significant relationships existing for novelty. Thus, people who

participated in more exciting and creative dates felt more inclined to repeat these dates in the future.

Similarly, when asked to consider their future dates within the following month, individuals who were more dedicated to their enacted date, and whose dates were more self-expanding, reported a greater desire to engage in dates in the longer term. In exploring self-expanding activities further, it appears that this effect is only true for dates that are more exciting, with no significant relationships present for novelty and creativity (Table 6). Interestingly, although in the shorter term both exciting and creative dates related to the increased likelihood of engaging in similar dates, it appears that exciting dates lead to a greater desire to participate in those dates over a longer period (e.g., one month).

Table 6

Correlations for Desire for Future Dates

Scale	Desire for Future Dates in the Next <i>Week</i>	Desire for Future Dates in the Next <i>Month</i>
Dedication	0.57**	0.61**
Commitment	0.45**	0.45**
Exciting	0.40**	0.37**
Creative	0.19*	0.13
Novel	0.16	0.12
Self-Expanding Composite	0.28**	0.23*
Approach Relationship Goals	0.35**	0.47**
Avoidance Relationship Goals	- 0.04	0.04

Note. * - $p < .05$; ** - $p < .01$

Moreover, people higher in approach relationship goals also expressed a greater desire to engage in similar dates in the future week and month, whereas those who were higher in avoidance relationship goals did not express significant desire to engage in similar dates in the future. Interestingly, avoidance relationship goals were negatively

related with desire to engage in activities during the following week, though not significant. These findings suggest that if Betty were higher in approach relationship goals, planning and engaging in a self-expanding date with her partner Patrick would be very desirable for her, thus she would be motivated to plan more dates that were similar in the future.⁹

I also conducted simultaneous regression analyses to test if the relations for desire for future dates were maintained when controlling for both approach and avoidance relationship goals. The regression equation indicated that approach and avoidance goals together significantly predicted desire for future dates in the next week ($F(2, 102) = 11.53, p < .001$), and in the next month ($F(2, 102) = 18.61, p < .001$). Within these equations, I found that both approach and avoidance relationship goals significantly predicted participants' desire to engage in similar dates in the future (Table 7); however, avoidance goals showed a negative relationship with desire for dates in the next week and in the next month, suggesting that people higher in avoidance goals expressed lower desire to engage in future dates (Table 7).

Table 7

Simultaneous Regression for Desire for Future Dates and Relationship Goals

Scale	Approach	Avoidance
	β	β
This Week	0.59**	- 0.30**
This Month	0.58**	- 0.21*

Note. ** - $p < .01$; * - $p < .05$.

Additionally, I conducted simultaneous regression analyses to explore if the relations for desire to participate in future dates were maintained when controlling for the qualities of the enacted activity. The regression equation indicated that the qualities of the

enacted dates significantly predicted desire for future dates in the next week and next month ($F(3, 100) = 19.57, p < .001$; $F(3, 100) = 10.40, p < .001$). I found that both dedication and enacted self-expansion significantly predicted participants' desire to engage in similar dates in the next week; however, only dedication significantly predicted participants' desire to engage in similar dates in the next month (Table 8).

Table 8

Simultaneous Regression for Desire for Future Dates and Activity Quality

Scale	Desire for Future Dates in the Next <i>Week</i>	Desire for Future Dates in the Next <i>Month</i>
	β	β
Dedication	0.64**	0.60**
Commitment	0.03	- 0.02
Enacted Self-Expanding Composite	0.28*	0.15

Note. ** - $p < .01$; * - $p < .05$.

Hypothesis 4. What role do self-expanding activities and relationship goals play in predicting changes in relationship quality? To explore if people who engaged in more self-expanding activities experienced increased relationship quality, as found in previous self-expansion literature (e.g., Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Reissman et al., 1993), I conducted a simple linear regression analysis using the change scores for relationship satisfaction as the outcome variable, and the self-expanding composite of the enacted date as the predictor variable. Results of the regression analysis revealed that the self-expanding content of the activity was not a significant predictor of change in relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -0.11, t(198) = -1.06, p = .29$) following the enacted date activity. Thus, contrary to past research, it did not appear that engaging in this activity was effective in enhancing relationship satisfaction over the course of one week.

Prior to exploring changes in relationship satisfaction and closeness over time, I examined the relation between approach relationship goals and measures of relationship quality in general. Descriptive statistics and correlations across the relationship variables are presented in Table 9. In support of previous findings (Impett et al., 2010), people who were higher in approach relationship goals reported significant associations with overall relationship satisfaction. However, in contrast to these previous findings, whereby they did not find significant relationships between avoidance relationship goals and relationship satisfaction, I found a significant, but small, relation. Results of Fisher's exact test of independence suggest that the relation with relationship satisfaction is significantly stronger for approach relationship goals than for avoidance relationship goals ($z = 4.71, p < .01$). This association suggests that people who were higher in approach relationship goals felt significantly more satisfied in their relationship in general. Moreover, although the results did not suggest significant changes in closeness from the planning to follow-up session, findings did show positive relations between approach relationship goals and closeness in general. People higher in approach relationship goals reported feeling closer to their partners during both the planning and follow-up sessions compared to those higher in avoidance relationship goals, who did not report a significant relation with closeness during either session (Table 9). In addition to relationship quality, people higher in approach relationship goals also experienced less boredom within their relationships, while avoidance relationship goals were not significantly associated with boredom.

Table 9

Correlations for Relationship Measures

Scale	Approach		Avoidance	
	Planning	Follow-Up	Planning	Follow-Up
Relationship Satisfaction	0.65**	0.70**	0.18*	0.21*
<i>Relational Boredom</i>	- 0.59**	- 0.69**	- 0.13	- 0.18
<i>Responsiveness</i>	0.69**	-	0.22*	-
<i>Relational Self-Expansion</i>	0.62**	0.63**	0.23**	0.20*
<i>Positive Affect</i>	0.42**	0.42**	0.26**	0.13
<i>Negative Affect</i>	- 0.22*	- 0.24*	0.02	- 0.03
Closeness	0.33**	0.42**	- 0.01	- 0.01

Note. ** - $p < .01$, * - $p < .05$. A dash indicates that the corresponding scale was not administered during that time point. Measures in italics were exploratory in nature within the context of the present research.

Additionally, I conducted a simultaneous regression analysis to explore if the effects for changes in relationship satisfaction and closeness were maintained when controlling for approach and avoidance relationship goals. These regression equations indicated that approach and avoidance goals together were not significant predictors of changes in relationship satisfaction ($F(2, 97) = 0.83, p = .44$), nor changes in closeness ($F(2, 102) = 0.71, p = .49$; Table 10).

Table 10

Simultaneous Regression for Changes in Relationship Quality and Relationship Goals

Scale	Change Scores	
	Approach	Avoidance
	β	β
Relationship Satisfaction	- 0.04	- 0.02
Closeness	0.10	0.02

Moreover, I conducted simultaneous regression analyses to test if the overall relations for relationship satisfaction and closeness were maintained when controlling for

both approach and avoidance relationship goals. During the planning and follow-up sessions, approach and avoidance goals together significantly predicted relationship satisfaction ($F(2, 129) = 49.19, p < .001$; $F(2, 99) = 50.72, p < .001$). In both cases, approach relationship goals significantly predicted participants' overall relationship satisfaction, whereas avoidance relationship goals were not a significant predictor (Table 11). Within the regression equation for closeness, in both the planning and follow-up sessions, the results from the regression equation showed that both approach and avoidance goals significantly predicted overall closeness ($F(2, 131) = 10.63, p < .001$; $F(2, 102) = 15.37, p < .001$). In each of these equations, both approach and avoidance goals were significant predictors of overall closeness; however, the negative coefficient for avoidance goals in each case indicates that as avoidance goals increase, relationship closeness decreases (Table 11).

Table 11

Simultaneous Regression for Overall Relationship Quality and Relationship Goals

Scale	Planned Date		Enacted Date	
	Approach	Avoidance	Approach	Avoidance
	β	β	β	β
Relationship Satisfaction	0.60**	- 0.09	0.58**	- 0.10
Closeness	0.57**	- 0.23**	0.76**	- 0.33**

Note. ** - $p < .01$.

These results suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals experience higher relationship quality in their relationships, and feel closer to their partners in general; however, in contrast to my prediction, their relationship quality did not significantly increase as a result of the shared activity that they participated in during the study.

Discussion

The goal of the present research was to further understand why people high in approach relationship goals have greater relationship quality. To do so, I explored the types of activities that people high in approach goals engage in with their partners. More specifically, I predicted that people higher in approach relationship goals would engage in activities with their partner that were more novel, exciting, and creative (i.e., self-expanding). The results of the present research supported this prediction, suggesting that people higher in approach relationship goals participate in activities with their partner that are more self-expanding (i.e., creative and exciting), and that they are engaging in these activities more frequently in their relationship. Moreover, the activities that these people plan are ones in which they are more dedicated and committed, and that they feel that their partner would also be highly interested in participating in with them.

What Types of Dates do People High in Approach Goals Engage In?

People high in approach goals were found to engage in more self-expanding shared activities with their partners (i.e., dates). In the current study, I defined self-expansion as being comprised of novelty, excitement, and creativity. Though the current findings did not suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals *planned* dates that were significantly more self-expanding, I did find that they *participated* in dates that were significantly more self-expanding. These findings suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals participate in more self-expanding activities with their partners. Simply engaging in self-expanding activities can facilitate increases in relationship quality over time, and increase feelings of closeness to one's partner (Coulter & Malouff, 2014). As such, with people higher in approach relationship goals choosing to

participate in activities that are more self-expanding, they are taking steps towards continued maintenance and growth in their relationship. This finding is therefore supportive of the prediction that people higher in approach relationship goals are more motivated towards seeking out growth-enhancing experiences in their relationship, including those which are exciting and creative (Gable, 2006; Mattingly et al., 2011).

One component of self-expanding activities that requires further investigation moving forward is the significance of creativity. In the existing literature surrounding shared activities in romantic relationships, the focus is typically upon novelty and excitement (Aron et al., 2002), with very little to no focus on creativity. As the current study showed that creativity was a significant factor within shared relationship activities, further investigation of this concept should be built upon in relationship research. Creativity can be broadly described as involving imagination, inspiration, and inventiveness (Plucker & Makel, 2010); however, much of the existing research in this domain looks at trait-level creativity (Davis, 1992; Feist, 1998). Particularly with the value of creativity being described as encouraging self-direction and improvement (Moran, 2010), this concept may be an important predictor of relationship well-being, and intriguing connection to the self-expansion literature. Although creativity could also overlap with novelty in its descriptors (e.g., inventive representing something new), with the present results suggesting the significance of creativity within the context of shared activities, research should continue to expand on state-level creativity within the relationship context. As such, I propose that creativity is an overarching theme that may encompass novelty, but encompasses a greater freedom of expression and breadth of experience, rather than simply assessing whether this is new for the couple (vs. familiar).

For example, Emerson, who is high in approach relationship goals, is more likely to take an activity that he has done with his partner Jordan in the past and adapt it in a creative way to add his own flare. Instead of simply going out for dinner and a movie, he may decide to go to a restaurant that incorporates Jordan's Caribbean heritage, and then bring him to an independent film theatre showing movies that were adapted for the Film Festival. This may not be something particularly novel for the couple, but is something that incorporates inventive components, thus making it more creative. The present research establishes creativity as a future direction for self-expansion research, particularly when continuing to explore the role of approach relationship goals within these activities.

An unexpected finding in the present research was the lack of significance of novelty as a contributor to the self-expanding properties of both the planned and enacted activities for those higher in approach relationship goals. Although past research has suggested that novelty is central within the self-expansion process, and an integral component in allowing people to expand their self-concept (Mattingly & Lewandowski Jr., 2014a), this does not appear to be the case within the present study. In contrast, for people higher in approach relationship goals, activities that were more creative and exciting were associated with higher relationship quality. In other words, the current results suggest that self-expansion may still occur over the course of the relationship without activities being highly novel. However, with the low alpha reliability for novelty within the follow-up session, it is possible that a more reliable measure of novelty would present significant findings in the future.

This finding is also present within the relation between approach goal people and the perceived familiarity of the planned date. Although I predicted that people higher in approach goals would participate in more novel activities, in contrast, they rated self-expanding dates as being more familiar to them, in addition to wanting to participate in them more frequently within their relationship. For example, if Taylor and Claudia went on weekly dates to various new restaurants in town, although each week they visited a new restaurant that they were both excited about, this date night may no longer be considered something that is new in their relationship. This is an important component of continued relationship maintenance, particularly with the higher content and quality of shared relationship activities predicting couple's experience of relationship satisfaction over time (Aron et al., 2000; Reissman et al., 1993). Thus, these findings further support the notion that approach-oriented people are engaging in these self-expanding activities more regularly with their partner, to the extent that they now consider these dates to be familiar. This demonstrates one way that people higher in approach relationship goals are actively seeking out opportunities for growth in their relationship, contributing to increased relationship quality and decreased relational boredom within their relationship.

In addition to the self-expanding content of dates planned by people higher in approach relationship goals, these people also planned and engaged in dates to which they were more dedicated and committed, and to which they felt that their partner would also be dedicated and committed. Previous research has indicated that partner-oriented activities that take into account the interests of *both* partners, lead to greater relationship satisfaction (Aron et al., 2001; Girme et al., 2014). As such, the current findings suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals are participating in activities that they

feel personally invested in, and that they feel their partner will also be invested in. This is a positive maintenance strategy for romantic couples, whereby both partners are integrated within the shared activity, thus encouraging growth in their relationship (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron et al., 2001). In other words, this provides support for why both people higher in approach goals and their partners are more satisfied with their relationships, as approach goal people are overcoming some of the known limitations of engaging in self-expanding activities, and consciously considering the interests of their partner (Aron et al., 2001).

Do People High in Approach Goals Participate in Self-Expanding Dates More Frequently?

In addition to their engagement in activities that are more self-expanding, people who are higher in approach relationship goals also find these dates more desirable, as seen through their motivation to continue participating in similar activities in the future. These findings expand upon previous research conducted by Mattingly and colleagues (2011), whereby they proposed that people who were higher in approach relationship goals were more likely to seek out new partners who offered more opportunities for self-expansion. Advancing this research, the current findings suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals continue to seek out, and create, opportunities to self-expand throughout the course of their relationship.

These findings relate to the Behavioural Activation System (BAS), whereby people higher in approach motivation seek out opportunities that offer rapid self-expansion (Aron et al., 1998; Gray, 1991). Similar to the BAS, an approach-oriented person has a higher sensitivity for experiences that are rewarding and stimulating (e.g.,

self-expanding activities). That is, approach goal people can achieve this positive arousal through participating in self-expanding (i.e., novel, exciting, and creative) activities (Aron et al., 1998). Thus, approach goal people do not only seek out partners who offer opportunities for self-expansion, but they also desire to create their own opportunities to self-expand within their ongoing romantic relationships in the future (e.g. through planning self-expanding activities). This desire to continue participating in experiences that offer them opportunities to satisfy their need for self-expansion is an important factor in continued relationship maintenance, and in increased relationship quality over time (Aron & Aron, 1986).

With findings suggesting that people higher in approach relationship goals are engaging in more frequent self-expanding dates with their partners, it is possible that approach goal peoples' increased feelings of positive affect is a motivator of engaging in higher quality activities more often (Impett et al., 2010). With the finding that people higher in approach relationship goals experienced higher levels of positive affect in general, their greater desire to participate in self-expanding activities is in line with research to suggest that positive emotions are linked to increased feelings of overlap with others, building upon the broaden-and-build theory of emotions (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). This theory posits that when people experience positive emotions, they are more likely to be motivated towards broadening their skills and personal resources, also expanding to include others in their sense of self (Fredrickson, 1998; Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006). As such, it is possible that positive affect helps to motivate people who are higher in approach relationship goals to desire to participate in future self-expanding activities within their relationship. In other words, if people higher in approach

relationship goals experience more positive affect, according to the broaden-and-build theory, they will be more likely to seek out new experiences and opportunities to expand their self to include close others moving forward (i.e., self-expanding relationship activities; Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006).

Do Self-Expanding Activities Influence Relationship Quality?

Within the present study, I did not find significant increases in relationship satisfaction over the course of the one-week period. These findings contrast past research in self-expanding, whereby couples who participated in self-expanding activities within their daily lives reported significant increases over time (e.g., Coulter & Malouff, 2014; Graham & Harf, 2014). It is possible that the absence of significant findings for changes in relationship quality could be a result of the high levels of relationship satisfaction overall (i.e., ceiling effects), thus reducing the ability to detect changes over time (Sprecher, 1999). In other words, during the planning session, participants expressed a high level of relationship satisfaction, limiting the extent to which satisfaction could continue to significantly increase over the course of the study. However, people who were higher in approach relationship goals did report higher relationship quality in general compared to those lower in approach relationship goals, and those higher in avoidance relationship goals. This finding was also supported through approach goals being a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction, whereas avoidance goals were not. This is in line with previous research to suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals are more satisfied within their relationships in general (Impett et al., 2010). Impett and colleagues' (2010) also found that people higher in approach relationship goals experienced significant increases in relationship satisfaction after a one

month period. Additionally, they found that this relation was mediated by approach goal people's higher positive affect. As such, with approach goal people having higher positive affect, I propose that over a longer period of time (e.g., one month), people higher in approach relationship goals may experience significant increases in relationship satisfaction as a result of their participation in significantly more self-expanding activities.

The present study contributed to the limited number of studies that have explored the content of dates that couples participate in without specific experimenter instruction. That is, through allowing participants to choose their shared activities, couples had complete freedom over the kind of date that they participated in, with the goal of exploring the types of activities that people were choosing to participate in within the context of their daily lives. As such, I did not instruct participants to engage in activities that would specifically enhance their relationship excitement, or that were self-defined as exciting (e.g., Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Reissman et al., 1993). Moreover, it is possible that the contrasting findings of no significant increases in relationship quality, as has been seen in previous research (e.g., Coulter & Malouff, 2013), is linked to the lack of manipulation of the type of activity that couples engaged in. It is possible that instructing couples to engage in activities that were specifically exciting may have been a factor in the findings that such activities are associated with significant increases in relationship satisfaction. Moreover, instructing participants to introduce different activities into their daily lives could also influence the level of novelty of such activities, particularly when such activities fall outside of the typical dates that a couple may engage in (Buchanan & Bardi, 2010). In contrast, the present study did not

introduce any new activities into participants' lives, through simply asking participants to plan a date of their choice with their partner. This could also be a factor for why participants did not feel that the activities they planned and engaged in within their daily lives were overly novel.

In similar work, Graham and Harf (2014) conducted studies both in the lab and using experience sampling methods, and found that the assessing the experiences within participants' daily lives resulted in much weaker findings for changes in relationship quality. The present findings present a similar, but non-significant, weak connection between shared activities and relationship satisfaction, suggesting that couples are not engaging in activities that are significantly enhancing their relationship quality when not specifically instructed to do so. Additionally, it is possible that one date in a week period is not sufficient for eliciting significant changes in relationship quality. Similar results have been found in the past, whereby one activity in a week span was not on its own enough to significantly increase relationship satisfaction (Reissman et al., 1993). However, we do see that they people higher in approach goals are more likely to participate in more self-expanding dates in the future, and have also participated in more self-expanding dates in the past. With this higher volume of self-expanding dates that people are engaging in, over time this will likely elicit significant increases in relationship quality, as seen previously whereby people higher in approach goals experience significantly higher relationship satisfaction over time (Impett et al., 2010). Future research would benefit from a further investigation of the day-to-day activities of people higher in approach relationship goals to see if over time these self-expanding activities are important factors in their increased relationship quality.

Implications

Relationship research is focused on how we can achieve enhanced relationship satisfaction and maintain close relationships over time. To advance our understanding of who is more adept at maintaining enhanced relationship quality, the present findings contribute to the existing knowledge of approach relationship goals by further exploring what these people are doing in their relationships to achieve greater relationship quality (i.e., the types of shared activities they engage in). These findings can be useful in implementing effective interventions for couples who are experiencing both high and low distress in their relationship by providing direction for ways of maintaining satisfaction and avoiding deterioration (Lavner & Bradbury, 2016). The present results for approach relationship goals and the quality of date activities could easily be incorporated into brief interventions that target increasing relationship quality, more specifically. Such interventions aim to promote relationship quality through focusing on behavioural patterns, and the existing strengths of their relationship (Lavner & Bradbury, 2016; Rogge et al., 2013). Through harnessing partners' individual strengths and differences (e.g., approach relationship goals), we can encourage them to take control of their relationship, and engage in activities that will foster increased relationship satisfaction over time (e.g., self-expanding activities). Additionally, we can aim to focus on those who may not be as adept at planning growth-enhancing relationship activities (i.e., avoidance relationship goal people), and aim to introduce new, self-expanding, activities into their relationships.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the present research advances the knowledge of who is planning higher quality dates within their romantic relationships, a few additional limitations should also be addressed moving forward.

Consistency and Validation of Measures

With the current measures of self-expansion, due to the inadvertent omission of an excitement measure within the planning session, the present self-expanding composites vary from the planning to follow-up sessions. This does not allow for a consistent comparison between participants' ratings of the self-expanding properties of their dates over time (i.e., planned vs. enacted date). Thus, the exclusion of excitement within the planned activity self-expansion composite could provide an alternative explanation for the lack of significance for approach relationship goals and planned self-expansion. Additionally, this would involve replicating the measures used during the follow-up session that provide increased reliability due to multiple measures, compared to the current face-valid measures used during the planning questionnaire.

Moreover, with several of the measures being adapted from previous research (i.e., dedication and commitment, self-expanding properties), another limitation of the present research is the lack of external validation for these measures. For example, the alpha reliability for novelty within the self-expanding content of the date is below that of an acceptable level ($\alpha = 0.58$), thus providing some concern for the validity of the items used to assess novelty as a characteristic of self-expansion.

Approach Goals and Date Quality in Other Populations

With the present study demonstrating many differences from past research findings, it is possible that the time of year, and location, of data collection, may have influenced participants' ability to fully engage in the study. The most evident example of this limitation is seen within the types of activities that people engaged in with their partners. In previous research, top relationship activities included traveling, physical activities, dining out together, and common interests (e.g., salsa lessons) (Girme et al., 2014). Moreover, in initial data collected within a community sample regarding planned date activities (Walker & Harasymchuk, 2017), almost half of the dates planned by couples involved an atypical activity (e.g., skydiving, travelling, going in a hot air balloon). In contrast, the scope of the activities that participants engaged in within the current sample was rather limited, with the majority including dining out together or going to a movie, but not expanding much beyond the local sphere. In contrasting a more diverse sample, it is unrealistic to expect the current university sample to plan more elaborate dates (e.g., travelling to Jamaica), particularly during an academic session. For example, it may be easier for university students to plan and engage in a date that is familiar and easy (e.g., dinner and a movie), rather than take time out of their studies to plan a novel and elaborate date (e.g., going on a hot air balloon ride). Also, with the location of the study being conducted in a winter climate, many of the activities are limited due to weather. An example of this is seen through the date descriptions (e.g., "going skating", "decorating the Christmas tree", "staying inside and watching holiday movies"). This contrasts previous activity studies whereby participants are not limited

due to the weather conditions, and thus have access to a wider array of activities (e.g., “going for picnic”, “going to the beach”, “going to an amusement park”).

Additionally, contrasting an anonymous community sample, within the credited student pool it is possible that the lack of anonymity may be a limiting factor for the detail that we obtain when assessing the activities that participants are engaging in with their partners. Within an anonymous community sample, the activity descriptions provide thoroughly detailed experiences of what people are doing with their partners, including components associated with intimacy and motivation that we do not see within a student sample (Walker & Harasymchuk, 2017). Thus, it is difficult to fully comprehend what people are doing with their partners from the short descriptions provided after the date activity. As such, it is likely that an experience sampling method may aid in further detailing what experiences people are having with their partners on a daily level, including activities surrounding intimacy.

Partners’ Perspectives of Shared Activities

Within the present research, I began to explore the effect of self-expanding activities and approach relationship goals from the perspective of the partner. In an initial investigation of partner results, I found support to suggest that partners rated dates planned by people higher in approach relationship goals as being significantly more self-expanding. Moreover, partners of people higher in approach relationship goals also felt significantly closer to their partner. However, although the present findings for partner reports suggest that both partners in the relationship are reaping the benefits of dates planned by people higher in approach relationship goals, the current small sample of partners does not provide enough power to confidently present these results. Further

exploration of a larger partner sample is necessary for expanding upon the current knowledge of how actor approach relationship goals relate to partners' experience of the relationship. Future research should aim to equally focus on partner involvement as a required component of the study, rather than an optional addition for participants. This addition would also provide greater reliability in the sample obtained to reduce bias from external relationship factors (i.e., more satisfied partners who are more involved, and more interested in participating). Additionally, a technical issue prevented a measure of relationship satisfaction from being administered within the partner follow-up questionnaire. To provide support to existing research that explores the relationship between approach relationship goals and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Impett et al., 2010), this is an important measure to investigate in future research.

Isolating Partner Contribution

Moreover, although my goal was to explore the types of dates that people higher in approach relationship goals were planning within their romantic relationships, it appeared that the dates planned within the present study involved a high level of partner contribution. Future research should look to further isolate the planning process to ensure that a more direct sense of what activities people are planning without the contribution of their partner. However, self-expanding literature has also provided support to suggest that engaging in activities that are partner-oriented result in increased positive outcomes within relationships (Girme et al., 2014). It is quite possible that people higher in approach relationship goals simply value having the contribution of their partner when planning shared date activities, and this also contributes to their higher relationship quality. Therefore, without fully isolating the participant's planning of the activity, we

should not discount the present findings that suggest people higher in approach are more adept in planning growth-enhancing time with their partners.

Conclusion

The present research has taken steps forward in exploring the relation between individual differences and the types of activities that are taking place within peoples' romantic relationships. More specifically, I examined the content and quality of dates that people higher in approach relationship goals plan and engage in within the context of their everyday lives. The findings suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals are more likely to engage in self-expanding activities with their partners, and that they are more dedicated and committed to their activities in general. Additionally, people higher in approach goals plan and engage in dates that are partner-oriented, whereby they take into account the dedication and commitment of their partners in their shared activities. I also found that people higher in approach relationship goals have an increased desire to engage in these activities in moving forward, and consider self-expanding activities to be more familiar for them. Although I did not find support to suggest that participating in one activity over the course of a week-long period was sufficient to increase relationship satisfaction in the short term, I did find that people higher in approach goals were more satisfied in their relationships in general. Together, the results highlighted the associations between approach relationship goals and relationship quality, demonstrating that people higher in approach relationship goals are more adept at planning higher quality, self-expanding activities, with their partner over the course of their relationship. Thus, I suggest that people higher in approach relationship goals are participating in higher quality activities more frequently over the course of their

relationship, thus promoting relational growth and maintenance, and bringing them to feel more satisfied in their relationships. With further research, we may continue to explore the relation between approach goals and relationship quality, and identify if their participation in higher quality, self-expanding, activities facilitates increases in increased relationship quality over a longer period of time. In sum, the present research has taken steps toward advancing our knowledge of *who* is engaging in more self-expanding activities in the context of their everyday relationships. That is, people who are higher in approach relationship goals are more adept at planning and engaging in higher quality activities (i.e., those which are self-expanding).

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Footnotes

¹ In addition to my primary hypotheses, I also predicted that the partners of partners of people high in approach relationship goals would be more likely to rate the date as having self-expanding properties. Thus, I expected that partners of those higher in approach relationship goals would also experience higher levels of closeness and positive affect.

² Interested partners ($N = 35$) were contacted one day after the participant's completion of the study, at which time the partner completed similar measures of relationship quality, and assessed the date that they engaged in with the participant during the previous week. Partners who completed the follow-up portion of the study were entered into a draw to win one of four \$50 movie ticket packages. Partner's ages ranged from 16 to 48 years old ($M = 21.60$ $SD = 5.98$), with 22 males (63%) and 13 females (37%).

³ All scales used within the present study were calculated through obtaining the mean of each scale's respective items.

⁴ During the planning session, in addition to the measures outlined within, participants also completed the Big Five Inventory to assess personality (Rammstedt & John, 2007), the Motivation for Shared Relationship activity to assess why they planned their date (Girme et al., 2014) and the Daily Relationship Threats measure to assess feelings of anxiety and rejection in their relationship (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). These measures were included for exploratory purposes only, and were not presently investigated within the context of the current study.

⁵ In the planning session, a measure of excitement was inadvertently omitted from the administration of the questionnaire.

⁶ During the follow-up session and partner follow-up session, in addition to the measures outlined within, participants also completed a measure of Activation to assess levels of arousal during the enacted activity (Graham, 2008), a measure of Personal Growth Initiative to assess self-growth within the activity (Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, & Aron, 2016), and a measure of Daily Relationship Threats to assess feelings of anxiety and rejection in their relationship (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). These measures were included for exploratory purposes only, and were not presently investigated within the context of the current study.

⁷ Participants' duration of their engaged activity ranged from 45 minutes to 15 hours, with the average length of activity around 3.52 hours ($SD = 2.08$ hours).

⁸ Partner Follow-Up Session. One day after the participant completed the follow-up session, I emailed interested partners to inform them of the study, and provide them with the brief description of the date that they engaged in during the past week (provided by their partner during the participant follow-up session). During the partner online follow-up session, interested partners began by completing measures mirroring the participants' planning session, including measures of relationship satisfaction, approach and avoidance relationship goals, relational boredom, responsiveness, self-expansion, positive and negative affect, and inclusion of other in the self. Partners then completed a short writing task to describe the date that they engaged in with the participant over the past six days.

After completing this description, mirroring the participant's final session, partners completed the same measures of intentions for future dates, excitement, creativity, novelty, desire to engage in the activity, overall activity content, closeness, and stress and tension.

⁹ Partner Perceptions of the Enacted Date. Due to the small sample size of partners recruited, the current findings for recruited partners is merely exploratory in nature. However, in support of my predictions, preliminary results suggest that the partners of people higher in approach relationship goals also rated their enacted dates as being significantly more self-expanding ($r = .47, p < .01$). In contrast, there was no significant relationship between avoidance relationship goals and partners' self-expanding rating ($r = 0.32, p = .06$). These findings support my prediction that partners of those higher in approach relationship goals would also rate their date as being more self-expanding.

In addition to the self-expanding nature of the date, I also found that partners of people higher in approach relationship goals felt closer to their partner ($r = .40, p < .05$), compared to those higher in avoidance relationship goals ($r = 0.25, p = .15$). However, there were significant relationships between both approach and avoidance relationship goals and partners' positive affect ($r = .39, p < .05$; $r = .36, p < .05$) (Table 9.1). These results support my initial hypotheses to suggest that partners of people higher in approach relationship goals also reap the benefits from engaging in these shared activities.

Table 9.1

Relationships between Participant Relationship Goals and Partner Relationship Ratings

Partner Rating	Partner Relationship Goals	
	Participant Approach Goals	Participant Avoidance Goals
Approach Relationship Goals	0.39*	0.16
Avoidance Relationship Goals	- 0.16	- 0.10
Relational Self-Expansion	0.34*	0.10
Closeness	0.39*	0.36*
Excitement	0.45**	0.34*
Creativity	0.49**	0.29
Novelty	0.22	0.17
Self-Expanding Composite	0.40*	0.25

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

Appendix A

Planned Couple Activity

During the next week, we are asking you to plan a date to engage in with your partner. This date may be anything of your choosing, but must be reasonable to engage in during the next 6 days. Please take a moment to think about the date that you would like to plan.

In the space below, please describe the date activity that you will plan for you and your partner in the next week. Please include a description of what you will be doing, when you plan to be doing it, and where the date will take place.

In the space below, please describe what motivated you to choose this activity to engage in with your partner this week.

We ask that in the next 6 days, you take part in this planned date with your partner. Please make a copy of your above plan for your date.

*Please confirm that you have made a copy of your planned date - **Yes / No.***

Appendix B
Content of the Date

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the below statements, when considering the date that you have planned to engage in during the next 6 days.

1. How pleasant is the activity that you have planned to engage in with your partner?

Not at all Pleasant		Neither Pleasant nor Unpleasant		Extremely Pleasant
1	2	3	4	5

2. How positive is the activity that you have planned to engage in with your partner?

Not at all Positive		Neither Exciting nor Unexciting		Extremely Positive
1	2	3	4	5

3. How challenging do you expect the activity to be for you and your partner?
(Graham & Harf, 2014)

Not at all Challenging		Neither Challenging nor Unchallenging		Extremely Challenging
1	2	3	4	5

4. How skilled are you at the activity that you have planned to engage in with your partner? (Graham & Harf, 2014)

Not at all Skilled		Neither Skilled nor Unskilled		Extremely Skilled
1	2	3	4	5

5. How familiar are you with the activity that you have planned to engage in with your partner?

Not at all Familiar		Neither Familiar nor Unfamiliar		Extremely Familiar
1	2	3	4	5

6. How creative is your planned activity?

Not at all Creative		Neither Creative nor Not Creative		Extremely Creative
1	2	3	4	5

7. How new will this activity be for you and your partner?

Very Typical (i.e., We do this activity regularly)		Neither New nor Typical (i.e., We have done this in the past, but not for some time)		Very New (i.e., We have never done this activity before)
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C

Dedication and Commitment (Girme et al., 2014)

Please rate the extent to which you feel the below statements embody the degree that you are about to engage in.

1. To what extent do you want to participate in this activity with your partner?

Not at All			Moderate Desire to Participate			Strong Desire to Participate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. How committed are you to participating in this activity with your partner?

Not Committed at All			Moderately Committed			Extremely Committed
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. To what extent do you feel that your partner will want to engage in this activity with you?

Not at All			Moderate Desire to Participate			Strong Desire to Participate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. How committed is your partner to participating in the activity?

Not Committed at All			Moderately Committed			Extremely Committed
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix D

Past Quantity of Dates

Please take a moment to consider the dates that you and your partner have engaged in recently, and answer the below questions accordingly.

How often have you planned dates for you and your partner in the past week?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How often has your partner planned dates for the two of you in the past week?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How often have you planned dates for you and your partner in the past month?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How often has your partner planned dates for the two of you in the past month?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix E

Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988)

Please take a moment to think about your relationship with your partner. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and according to the scale below:

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?

Poorly		Average		Extremely Well
1	2	3	4	5

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

Unsatisfied		Average		Extremely Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?

Poor		Average		Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

4. How often do you wish that you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

Never		Average		Very Often
1	2	3	4	5

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

Hardly at all		Average		Completely
1	2	3	4	5

6. How much do you love your partner?

Not much		Average		Very Much
1	2	3	4	5

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?

Very few		Average		Very Many
1	2	3	4	5

Appendix F

Relational Boredom Scale (Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2012)

Please rate the following statements in terms of how well each characterizes your relationship with your partner.

Not at all True			Neither True nor Untrue			Completely True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Dull	_____	Lots of fun		Feels like a chore	_____
Full of romance	_____	Unfulfilled		There is a spark	_____
Full of surprises	_____	Exciting		Don't share feelings with each other	_____
Lacks conversation	_____	Sick and tired of my partner		Thrilling	_____
Feel nothing	_____	Leave Blank		Interested in my partner	_____
		Feels like I want change		_____	

How frequently do you feel bored in your relationship?

Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Sometimes to often	Often	Almost all of the time	All the time
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix G

Self-Expansion Questionnaire (Lewandowski Jr. & Aron, 2002)

Please answer each question according to the way you personally feel, using the following scale. Please be open and honest in your responding.

Not Very Much			Moderately			Very Much
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. How much does being with your partner result in you having new experiences?

2. When you are with your partner, do you feel a greater awareness of things because of them? _____
3. How much does your partner increase your ability to accomplish new things?

4. How much does being with your partner make you more appealing to potential future mates? _____
5. How much does your partner help to expand your sense of the kind of person you are? _____
6. How much do you see your partner as a way to expand your own capabilities?

7. Do you often learn new things about your partner? _____
8. How much does your partner provide a source of exciting experiences? _____
9. How much do your partner's strengths as a person (skills, abilities, etc.) compensate for some of your own weaknesses as a person? _____
10. How much do you feel that you have a larger perspective on things because of your partner? _____
11. How much has being with your partner resulted in your learning new things?

12. How much has knowing your partner made you a better person? _____
13. How much does being with your partner increase the respect other people have for you? _____
14. How much does your partner increase your knowledge? _____

Appendix H

Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992)

Please select the picture below that best represents how connected you feel to your partner:

Appendix I

Responsiveness Scale (Reis, 2003)

Please respond to the following statements in terms of how well each characterizes your relationship with your partner.

Not at all True			Neither True nor Untrue			Completely True
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I am an excellent judge of my partner's character. _____
2. I see who my partner really is. _____
3. I know my partner well. _____
4. I am responsive to my partners' needs. _____
5. I am interested in doing things with my partner. _____
6. I understand my partner. _____
7. I focus on the best side of my partner. _____
8. I value my partner's abilities and opinions. _____
9. I understand my partner. _____

Appendix J

Relationship Goals Measure (Elliot et al., 2006; Impett et al., 2010)

Please consider the following statements when it comes to your own actions and feelings in your romantic relationship.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. I try to avoid getting embarrassed, betrayed, or hurt by my romantic partner.

2. I try to enhance the bonding and intimacy in my romantic relationship.

3. I try to avoid disagreements and conflicts with my romantic partner. _____
4. I try to deepen my relationships with my romantic partner. _____
5. I try to make sure that nothing bad happens in my romantic relationship.

6. I try to share many fun and meaningful experiences with my romantic partner.

7. I try to stay away from situations that could harm my romantic relationship.

8. I try to move toward growth and development in my romantic relationship.

Appendix K

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark & Tellegan, 1988)

This scale consists of a number of words and phrases that describe different feelings and emotions. Please read each item and then indicate to what extent you have felt this way **during the past week**. Use the following scale to record your answers:

Very slightly or not at all	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
1	2	3	4	5

Interested _____	Distressed _____	Excited _____
Upset _____	Strong _____	Guilty _____
Scared _____	Leave Blank _____	Enthusiastic _____
Proud _____	Irritable _____	Alert _____
Ashamed _____	Inspired _____	Nervous _____
Determined _____	Attentive _____	Jittery _____
Active _____	Hostile _____	Afraid _____

Appendix L
Enacted Activity

You may recall that during Part 1 of the study, we asked that you plan a date to engage in with your partner over the course of the past 6 days. We want to ask you some questions about that date.

In the past week, since completing Part 1 of the study, were you able to engage in a shared activity / date with your romantic partner? **Yes / No**

During the past week, were you able to participate in the date that you planned during Part 1 of the study (or a similar date to the one that you planned) with your partner? **Yes / No.**

If No: During the past week, were you able to participate in a shared activity / date with your partner that was not planned during Part 1 of the study? Yes / No

If No: During the past week, did you engage in any shared activities with your partner? Yes/No

If No: Proceed to the Withdrawal Form (Appendix XV).

Participants that respond “Yes” to *any* of the above questions will proceed to the questions below regarding the content and planning of the date.

When did you initially plan the date that you engaged in this week?

- ☐ Before Part 1 of the study
- ☐ During the planning stage of Part 1 of the study
- ☐ Spontaneously (i.e., last minute)
- ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Who initiated the idea for this date?

- ☐ I initiated the idea for this date.
- ☐ My partner initiated the idea for this date.
- ☐ Someone else initiated the idea for this date.

Did you have input from your partner in planning this date? **Yes / No.**

How involved was your partner in the planning of this date?

Not at all Involved		Neither Involved nor Uninvolved		Extremely Involved
1	2	3	4	5

In the space below, please describe the date that you planned and participated in with your partner this past week. (If you engaged in multiple dates with your partner, please choose only one activity).

When did this date occur? (i.e., September 1st, 2016) _____

What time did this date occur? (i.e., 12:43 pm) _____

How long did this activity last for? (in minutes) _____

In the space below, please identify any challenges that you may have faced during the activity, or during the planning stages

In the space below, please identify any new knowledge or experiences that you gained from engaging in this date with your partner. (e.g., Did you feel as though you gained a new perspective throughout the date? Did you engage in something that was out of the ordinary for you?)

Appendix M

Excitement Scale (Malouff et al., 2012)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the below statements, when considering the date that you engaged in during the past 6 days.

Very Slightly or Not at All	A Little	Moderately	Quite a Bit	Extremely
1	2	3	4	5

Our date was...

Exciting	_____	Passionate	_____	Adventurous	_____
Interesting	_____	Playful	_____	Sexual	_____
Spontaneous	_____	Boring	_____	Romantic	_____
Novel	_____	Creative	_____	Leave Blank	_____
Inventive	_____	Familiar	_____	Different	_____
		Imaginative	_____		

Appendix N

Closeness (Girme, Overall, & Faingataa, 2014)

Please indicate the extent to which you feel the below statements, when considering the date that you engaged in over the past 6 days.

1. To what extent did engaging in this activity bring you closer together to your partner?

Did Not Bring Us Closer at All			Brought us Moderately Closer			Brought Us a Lot Closer
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. To what extent did engaging in the activity provide meaning and satisfaction to your relationship?

Did Not Provide Us Satisfaction at All			Moderately Committed			Provided a Great Deal of Satisfaction
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. To what extent did the activity make you feel accepted and valued by your partner?

Did Not Feel Accepted/Valued at All			Moderately Accepted/Valued			Felt Extremely Accepted/Valued
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

4. To what extent did the activity make you feel close and intimate with your partner?

Did Not Feel Close/Intimate at All			Moderately Committed			Felt Extremely Close/Intimate
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix O

Stress and Tension (Girme, Overall, & Faingataa, 2014)

Please indicate the extent to which you feel the below statement, when considering the date that you engaged in over the past 6 days.

1. To what extent did engaging in this activity lead to stress and tension in your relationship?

No Stress and Tension at All			Moderate Stress and Tension			Extreme Stress and Tension
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix P

Intentions for Future Dates

Please take a moment to consider the dates that you would like to participate in with your partner in the future.

How much would you like to engage in similar dates in the next week?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How much would you like to engage in similar dates in the next month?

Not at All		Moderately		Very Much
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix Q

Activity Coding

Please code each description based on the following categories. If you feel that the description fits with the category and description, assign it a “1” in SPSS under the column for the corresponding category. If it does not fit with the category, assign it a “0”.

****Activity Descriptions may fall under more than one category****

Category	Description	Codes
1. Meal (at home)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks... Stay in, at home... etc. 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
2. Meal (at restaurant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks... Out at a restaurant or other establishment <i>Does not include “popcorn”</i> 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
3. Movie (at home)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes Netflix 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
4. Movie (at theatre)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes VIP movies 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
5. Walk (downtown)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking a walk in an urban environment (i.e., the Market) 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
6. Walk (in nature)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking a walk somewhere natural (i.e., park, forest) 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
7. Shopping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not include <i>online</i> shopping 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
8. Coffee/Tea/Hot Chocolate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any kind of warm beverage – could also be coded under meal if indicated snacks 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
9. Alcoholic Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes drinks at home and/or at a pub etc. 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
10. Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities that are not overly ‘sporty’ Examples: board games, charades, video games 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
11. Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher arousal activities that can be classified as a sport Examples: bowling, mini-putting, skating 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
12. Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultural activities Examples: museums, galleries 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
13. Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examples: concert, karaoke 	0 = N/A 1 = YES
14. Other, please specify...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Select and enter the theme of the activity into the “Please Specify” variable. Can be used in conjunction with a category if it is a more unique activity. Example: massages, baking together, decorating 	0 = N/A 1 = YES