

For Better or for Worse? Outsourcing Self-Regulation and Goal Pursuit

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in how close relationships can impact personal goal pursuit. Extensive research on social support has shown that support often facilitates goal pursuit. However, Fitzsimons and Finkel found that perceived partner support may actually undermine motivation and decrease goal pursuit intentions. In this article, we report three well-powered studies ($N = 850$) that investigated the conditions under which romantic partners may bolster or undermine goal pursuit. In contrast with the original Fitzsimons and Finkel's findings, the results of these studies consistently showed that perceived partner support *bolsters* goal pursuit intentions by increasing goal commitment. Implications for successful goal pursuit in the context of relationships are discussed.

Keywords

interpersonal relationships, self-regulation, goal pursuit, social support

“There are people who, the more you do for them, the less they will do for themselves.”

Jane Austen (2016, p. 699)

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

The sentiments on goal pursuit put forth by Austen and Keller differ, and their ideas reflect an important question: Do close others help or hinder goal pursuit? Whereas Austen implies that support from others can be demotivating, Keller suggests the opposite. Abundant evidence from the social support literature suggests that close others can boost goal attainment (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Cohen & Wills, 1985), and by definition, social support provides people with resources to pursue their goals (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000). On the other hand, relying on others for help may hurt goal pursuit (Latané, Williams, & Harkins, 1979). In a series of studies, Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011) found that being reminded that a close other helps with goal pursuit reduced one's intentions to pursue that goal, an effect they called *outsourcing self-regulation*. In other words, thinking of how a partner can be helpful to one's goals may lead one to believe “my partner will take care of that for me, so I don't have to.” The current research attempts to address these seemingly conflicting accounts of interpersonal influences on goal pursuit by exploring the circumstances under which close others boost or undermine goal pursuit, as well as the mechanisms underlying these relationships.

At any point in time, people have multiple goals (Kruglanski et al., 2002). People may want to have successful careers but also enjoy time with friends and family. Despite their desire to pursue multiple goals, people have limited resources (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; cf. Lurquin et al., 2016) and may need to rely on others for support. In such instances (e.g., low energy after an exhausting day at work), others may serve as means to one's goal pursuit (Orehek & Forest, 2016). For example, if Jill has a partner, Jack, who cooks healthy meals for her and thus advances her health goals, Jill may be inclined to invest less time and energy advancing this goal herself and may choose to conserve her resources for pursuing her other goals. In line with this notion, Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011) showed that considering how others would help with the pursuit of health and fitness goals reduced people's intentions to expend their own effort to pursue this goal, particularly when their resources were limited (e.g., following a cognitively demanding task). This is akin to perceived *goal progress* whereby a person interprets a partner's support as movement toward the goal; when people perceive goal

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progress, they may be inclined to switch their focus to pursue other goals (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005). In other words, even if Jill remains committed to the health goal that her partner serves, Jack's support may be interpreted as health goal progress and may prompt Jill to switch to pursuing other goals rather than persevering on the same goal.

On the other hand, remembering that one can rely on others to advance one's goals may be perceived as *goal commitment* rather than goal progress and may prompt continued pursuit of the same goal (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005). Indeed, the social support literature suggests that in some cases, support from close others to achieve a goal may boost self-efficacy (Anderson, Winett, & Wojcik, 2007), leading one to feel more equipped to achieve a goal, which may in turn facilitate goal pursuit. For instance, if Jack cooks healthy dinners (advancing Jill's health goals), Jill may feel more committed to reaching her health goals, because the goal seems more attainable.

The above analysis suggests that the same action (a partner's help or support) could be interpreted as goal progress *or* goal commitment. While perceived goal progress may result in subsequent actions *inconsistent* with the goal, perceived goal commitment should prompt subsequent actions *consistent* with the goal. In the current studies, we specifically focused on the effects of perceived partner support on goal commitment and intentions to pursue a goal.

An important factor that can influence the way a partner's support is perceived is the *type* of support provided. One may perceive a partner as providing esteem-related, validating support (emotional support); alternatively, one may perceive a partner as providing tangible, concrete help (instrumental support; Semmer et al., 2008). The type of partner support and its possible effects on goal pursuit are unclear. For instance, whereas *instrumental* support may be substitutable for personal effort and may thus *decrease* goal pursuit intentions (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011), emotional support may not be as directly substitutable. However, research on physical activity shows the opposite pattern; instrumental support significantly increased physical activity over a 19-week intervention (Siceloff, Wilson, & Horn, 2013), suggesting that instrumental support may be especially important for increasing goal commitment and therefore the likelihood of goal attainment.

The present research attempts to reconcile prior outsourcing self-regulation findings (suggesting that thinking about support from others may hinder individual goal pursuit) with extensive social support research suggesting that relying on others bolsters goal pursuit. In three well-powered studies, we methodologically replicated the research conducted by Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011). Additionally, we explored the role of goal commitment (Studies 1–3) and the ways that specific types of social support may influence goal pursuit intentions (Study 3).

According to the findings from the original outsourcing study (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011), one would expect that participants prompted to think of how a partner helps with their health and fitness goals (vs. career goals) would plan to spend *less time and effort* on health and fitness goals in the upcoming week. Furthermore, this effect should be particularly strong

when participants' cognitive resources are low. This might be the case because a person whose resources are depleted would be less likely to invest in goal pursuit, especially when that particular goal could be attained with the help of others. However, the social support literature suggests the opposite pattern of findings might be expected: Perceiving one's partner as instrumental to one's health and fitness goals (vs. career goals) should increase goal pursuit intentions, and this effect should be particularly strong when cognitive resources are low. This may be the case because feeling depleted should decrease the expectancy of goal attainment; in such circumstances, a supportive partner may alleviate this effect.

Study 1

We aimed to test the effect of perceived partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions and the extent to which individuals' limited resources may exacerbate this effect. Furthermore, we aimed to explore the mediating role of goal commitment. In order to do so, we employed a 2×2 design, with partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and resources (low vs. control) as between-subjects factors.

Method

Study 1 was a direct replication of Study 1 from the original Fitzsimons and Finkel's (2011) paper and was preregistered with the Open Science Framework. Two hundred sixty-three female participants in committed romantic relationships were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Guidelines for direct replication studies suggest an estimate of at least 95% power to detect anticipated effects ($\alpha = .05$). Based on a computation of the effect size achieved in the original outsourcing study ($f = .585$), we sought to be conservative and thus opted for an effect size that was slightly less than half of the effect size in the original study ($f = .25$). For Study 1, based on calculations using G*Power software (Version 3.1; estimated effect size $f = .25$, numerator $df = 1$, and number of groups = 4), the minimum total participants needed were 210. In order to be certain that there would be enough power to detect effects after data screening, a total of 263 participants were recruited.

Of the 263 participants recruited, 7 participants were male and 46 participants did not follow the study instructions (either they did not write down one way their partner helps with a health and fitness goal and/or they failed to complete the resource depletion manipulation as instructed); thus, those participants were excluded from analyses. A total of 210 participants were analyzed for Study 1 ($N = 210$, all female, mean age = 35.03, $SD = 11.38$; see Table 1). Only women were recruited for the study, consistent with the original Fitzsimons and Finkel's (2011) study.

Procedure

Consistent with the procedures followed by Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011), people were recruited for a study investigating

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Study Variables.

Variables	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	N = 210		N = 337		N = 303	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Relationship length (years)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	7.98	8.71
Age	35.03	11.38	32.17	9.52	35.19	10.66
Gender (% female)	100%	N/A	100%	N/A	56.40%	N/A
Race/ethnicity (%)						
White/Caucasian	74.30%	N/A	76.90%	N/A	79.90%	N/A
Black/African American	9.00%	N/A	6.50%	N/A	7.60%	N/A
East Asian	4.80%	N/A	6.50%	N/A	6.60%	N/A
Middle Eastern	0.00%	N/A	0.60%	N/A	0.00%	N/A
Hispanic	6.70%	N/A	4.50%	N/A	3.60%	N/A
Native American	1.00%	N/A	1.20%	N/A	1.00%	N/A
Multiracial	4.30%	N/A	3.90%	N/A	1.30%	N/A

interpersonal relationships and goals. The survey contained very brief prescreening questions as eligibility criteria (i.e., are you in a committed romantic relationship?) that only allowed participants to continue if the answer was “yes.” Eligible participants first underwent a task designed to manipulate cognitive resources. Specifically, participants either retyped a paragraph “skipping all vowels that come two letters after another vowel” (low resource condition) or participants retyped the same paragraph with the instructions to “skip all vowels” (control resources condition).

To manipulate partner instrumentality, participants were asked to provide an example of how their partner helps with their health and fitness goals (high instrumentality condition) or to provide an example of how their partner helps with an alternative, career goal (control condition). Participants then reported their intentions to pursue their health and fitness goals in the upcoming week, which was the dependent variable of interest. Specifically, participants rated the amount of time and effort they planned to spend on health and fitness in the upcoming week (1 = *much less than usual* to 5 = *much more than usual*). The answers on the two questions were highly correlated ($r = .885, p < .001$) and were therefore averaged and used as an indicator of participants’ goal pursuit intentions.

To assess goal commitment, participants rated goal importance (“My health and fitness are important to me”) and how much they cared about goal progress (“I care about my progress on my health and fitness goals”) on a 1–7 scale (1 = *I completely disagree* to 7 = *I completely agree*; $r = .912, p < .001$). The average score on these 2 items was used as an indicator of goal commitment. Finally, participants provided demographic information.

Results

Using SPSS version 24, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test the effect of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and resources (low vs. control)

on goal pursuit intentions; results are displayed in Table 2. Similar to Fitzsimons and Finkel’s (2011) findings, there was no main effect of resources on goal pursuit intentions. There was a significant main effect of partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions; specifically, participants planned to spend *more time and effort* on their health and fitness goals when they perceived their partner as instrumental to these goals compared to the alternative career goals (see Table 3).

The analysis also revealed a significant interaction between partner instrumentality and resources (see Figure 1a). Simple effects analysis showed that the effect of partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions was only significant in the low resources condition and not in the control resources condition; participants planned to spend significantly more time and effort on health and fitness goals when they had considered how their partner was instrumental to these goals (vs. the alternative career goal), but only in the low resources condition. Within the control resources condition, there was no difference in planned time and effort to pursue the health and fitness goal as a function of partner instrumentality (see Table 3).

A second ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of partner instrumentality on goal commitment (see Table 2 and Figure 1b); specifically, participants who were led to perceive their partner as instrumental to their health and fitness goals reported higher commitment to these goals than participants who perceived their partner as instrumental to the alternative career goal. However, this effect was not moderated by resources (see Table 2 and Figure 1b).

These results contrast with the findings of Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011) who did not find an effect of perceived partner instrumentality on goal commitment. However, they are in line with the social support literature, which suggests that perceived partner instrumentality (i.e., support) may boost one’s expectancy for goal attainment and thus goal commitment, which in turn may increase goal pursuit intentions. To test this possibility directly, we conducted a mediated moderation analysis using the PROCESS macro (Model 5) in SPSS with 10,000

Table 2. Analysis of Variance Results for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Partner Instrumentality and Cognitive Resources in Study 1.

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η_p^2
Dependent Variable (DV): Goal pursuit intentions						
Partner instrumentality	9.64	1	9.64	11.52	.001**	.053**
Resources	0.38	1	0.38	0.45	.503	.002
Instrumentality \times Resources	6.10	1	6.10	7.29	.008**	.034**
Error	172.42	206	0.84			
Total	2,273.50	210				
Corrected total	186.62	209				
Simple effects: Resources _{Low}	13.61	1	13.61	16.26	.001**	.162**
Error	172.42	206	0.84			
Simple effects: Resources _{Control}	0.24	1	0.24	0.28	.597	.002
Error	172.42	206	0.84			
Dependent Variable (DV): Goal commitment						
Partner instrumentality	13.27	1	13.27	7.23	.008**	.034**
Resources	0.02	1	0.02	0.01	.919	.000
Instrumentality \times Resources	6.20	1	6.20	3.38	.068	.016
Error	378.20	206	1.84			
Total	6,715.00	210				
Corrected total	395.46	209				

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Means, SDs, SEs, 95% CIs, and Cohen's d for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Partner Instrumentality and Cognitive Resources in Study 1.

Variables	High Instrumentality				Control Instrumentality				Cohen's d	95% CI for d
	M	SD	SE	95% CI	M	SD	SE	95% CI		
DV: Goal pursuit intentions										
Instrumentality main effect	3.37	1.03	.09	[3.20, 3.55]	2.94	0.80	.09	[2.76, 3.12]	.465**	[0.190, 0.739]
Low resources	3.59	1.02	.14	[3.32, 3.86]	2.81	0.75	.14	[2.54, 3.08]	.871**	[0.439, 1.30]
Control resources	3.16	1.01	.12	[2.93, 3.39]	3.07	0.83	.12	[2.83, 3.31]	.098	[-0.261, 0.456]
DV: Goal commitment										
Instrumentality main effect	5.74	1.24	.13	[5.45, 6.00]	5.23	1.48	.14	[4.96, 5.50]	.374**	[0.102, 0.647]
Low resources	5.92	1.22	.20	[5.52, 6.32]	5.07	1.56	.20	[4.67, 5.47]	.607**	[0.184, 1.03]
Control resources	5.57	1.23	.17	[5.22, 5.89]	5.40	1.41	.18	[5.04, 5.75]	.129	[-0.230, 0.488]

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2013). The analysis revealed that the effect of perceived partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions was indeed mediated by goal commitment as suggested by a significant indirect effect. Specifically, perceiving one's partner as instrumental to one's health and fitness goals (vs. career goal) increased commitment to health and fitness goals, which in turn increased goal pursuit intentions. Partner instrumentality led to increased goal pursuit intentions only when cognitive resources were low (see Figure 1c).

The above findings offer preliminary support for the notion that relying on close others for support may in fact facilitate rather than reduce goal pursuit intentions. The results are in line with the social support literature and in contrast to the outsourcing findings previously reported by Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011). To ensure that our Study 1 findings (including the mediation analysis of goal commitment) were not spurious, we conducted a *rereplication* of this study.

Study 2

Method

To guide calculations for an appropriate sample size, a power analysis was conducted using the effect size from the interaction term of partner instrumentality and resources ($f = .19$) obtained in Study 1. Using G*Power software (Version 3.1; estimated effect size of $f = .19$, numerator $df = 1$, and number of groups = 4), the minimum total participants needed were 372 in order to achieve 95% power.

A total of 433 female participants in committed romantic relationships were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk to help ensure that we would have the desired power after data screening. Fourteen participants did not provide an example of how their partner was instrumental, and 92 participants failed to complete the resources manipulation as instructed. Thus, these participants were excluded from analyses, and a priori

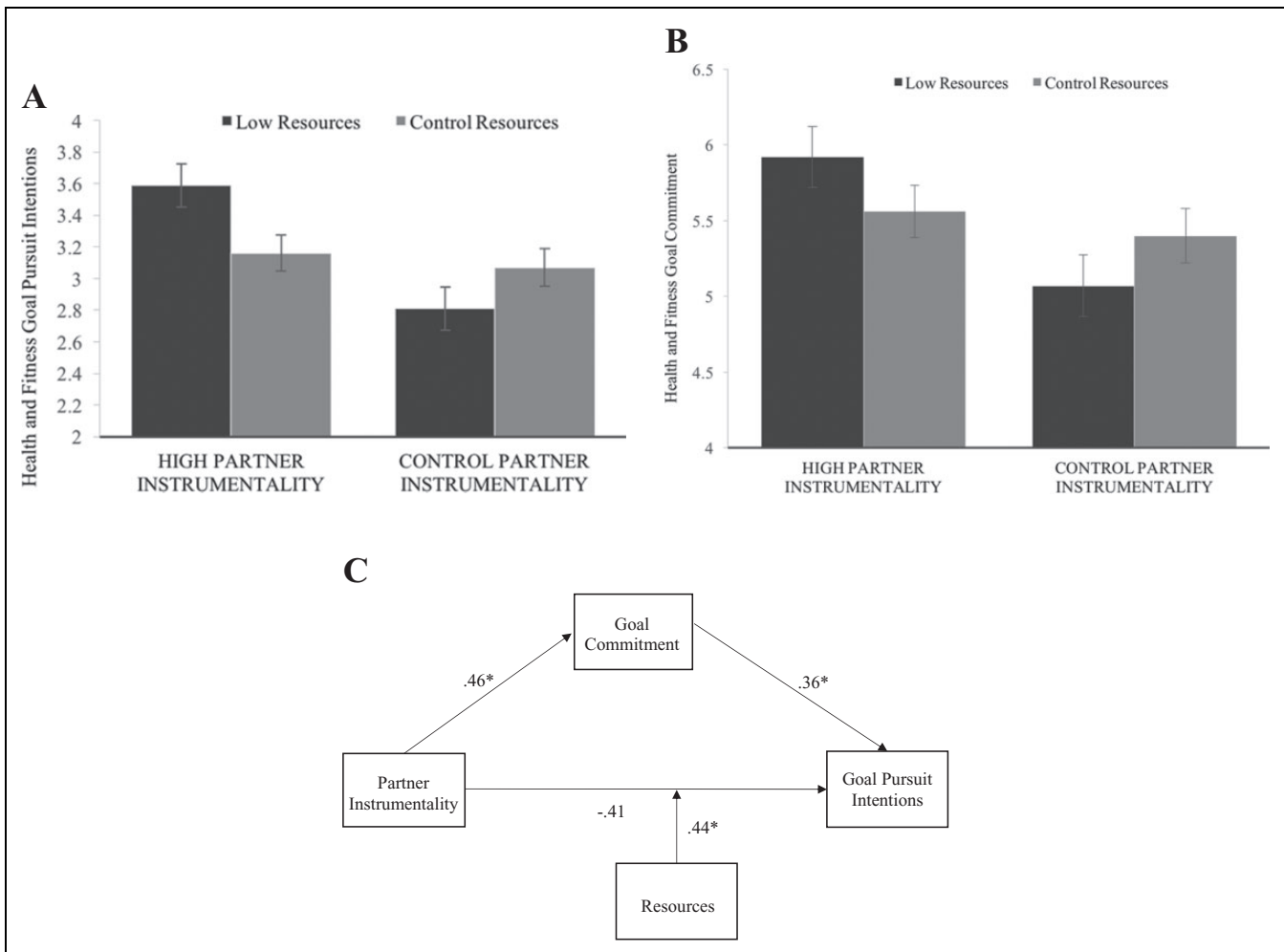


Figure 1. (a) Goal pursuit intentions as a function of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and amount of resources (low vs. control) in Study 1. Participants with instrumental partners planned to pursue their health and fitness goal to a greater extent than those in the control instrumentality condition, especially when resources were low. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (b) Goal commitment as a function of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and amount of resources (low vs. control) in Study 1. Participants with instrumental partners had greater commitment to their health and fitness goal than those in the control instrumentality condition. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (c) The effects of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions via goal commitment in Study 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed above; the direct effect of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions was only significant when cognitive resources were low. The indirect effect of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions was 0.16 ($SE = .07$), which was statistically significant, 95% confidence interval [.0358, .3081]. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

power was reduced to approximately 93%. A total of 337 participants were analyzed for Study 2 ($N = 337$, all female, mean age = 32.17, $SD = 9.52$; see Table 1).

Procedure

The procedure for Study 2 was identical to Study 1. We predicted that Study 2 would replicate the findings from Study 1.

Results

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and resources (low vs. control) as between-subjects factors. Consistent with Study 1, there was

no main effect of resources on goal pursuit intentions. There was a significant main effect of partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions (see Table 4); participants planned to spend more time and effort on their health and fitness goals in the high partner instrumentality condition than in the control partner instrumentality condition, successfully replicating Study 1 findings (see Table 5 and Figure 2a).

The interaction between partner instrumentality and resources was not significant. Simple effects analysis showed that the effect of the instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions was significant in both the low resources condition and in the control resources condition (see Table 4). In both the low resources condition and the control resources condition, participants with instrumental partners for the health and

Table 4. Analysis of Variance Results for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Partner Instrumentality and Cognitive Resources in Study 2.

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η_p^2
DV: Goal pursuit intentions						
Partner instrumentality	5.53	1	5.53	8.42	.004**	.025**
Resources	1.39	1	1.39	2.11	.147	.006
Instrumentality \times Resources	0.18	1	0.18	0.28	.599	.001
Error	218.65	333	0.66			
Total	3,664.25	337				
Corrected total	225.52	336				
Simple effects: Resources _{Low}	2.98	1	2.98	4.54	.034*	
Error	218.65	333	0.66			
Simple effects: Resources _{Control}	2.622	1	2.62	3.99	.046*	
Error	218.650	333	0.66			
DV: Goal commitment						
Partner instrumentality	13.98	1	13.98	7.13	.008**	.021**
Resources	5.30	1	5.30	2.70	.101	.008
Instrumentality \times Resources	0.68	1	0.68	0.35	.557	.001
Error	652.86	333	1.96			
Total	10,591.50	337				
Corrected total	675.82	336				

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5. Means, SDs, SEs, 95% CIs, and Cohen's d for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Partner Instrumentality and Cognitive Resources in Study 2.

Variables	High Instrumentality				Control Instrumentality				Cohen's d	95% CI for d
	M	SD	SE	95% CI	M	SD	SE	95% CI		
DV: Goal pursuit intentions										
Instrumentality main effect	3.35	0.81	.07	[3.22, 3.48]	3.08	0.81	.07	[2.95, 3.21]	.333**	[.118, .548]
Low resources	3.26	0.76	.08	[3.11, 3.41]	3.04	0.77	.08	[2.88, 3.19]	.288*	[.021, .555]
Control resources	3.44	0.90	.11	[3.23, 3.65]	3.12	0.87	.11	[2.92, 3.33]	.362*	[-.001, .724]
DV: Goal commitment										
Instrumentality main effect	5.67	1.29	.11	[5.45, 5.90]	5.25	1.51	.11	[5.03, 5.47]	.299**	[.084, .514]
Low resources	5.59	1.28	.13	[5.33, 5.85]	5.07	1.55	.14	[4.90, 5.34]	.366**	[.099, .634]
Control resources	5.76	1.31	.18	[5.39, 6.12]	5.43	1.43	.18	[5.07, 5.78]	.240	[-.120, .601]

Note. CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

fitness goal planned to spend more time and effort on the health and fitness goal than those in the control instrumentality condition (see Table 5). Although the moderation results did not replicate the findings from Study 1, the overall pattern of effects between the two studies was similar, in that greater partner instrumentality led to increased goal pursuit intentions.

In line with Study 1 findings, a second ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of partner instrumentality on goal commitment (see Figure 2b). Participants who perceived their partner as instrumental to their health and fitness goals reported higher commitment to these goals than participants who perceived their partner as instrumental to the alternative career goal. Similar to Study 1, there was not a significant interaction between resources and partner instrumentality on goal commitment (see Table 4).

To test the extent to which increased goal commitment is the mechanism through which partner instrumentality influences

goal pursuit intentions, we conducted a simple mediation analysis using PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2013). This analysis revealed that the effect of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) on goal pursuit intentions was indeed mediated by goal commitment, as suggested by a significant indirect effect. Thus, greater partner instrumentality led to increased goal commitment, which in turn increased goal pursuit intentions (see Figure 2c).

Results from Studies 1 and 2 consistently showed that greater partner instrumentality increased goal pursuit intentions by increasing goal commitment, in line with research on social support. Although partner support may be substituted for one's own effort and may lead to perceived goal progress, Studies 1 and 2 did not support this idea. Thus, it may have been the case that participants did not consider their romantic partners as "means" to the health and fitness goal but rather as sources of support that increased the likelihood of attaining one's

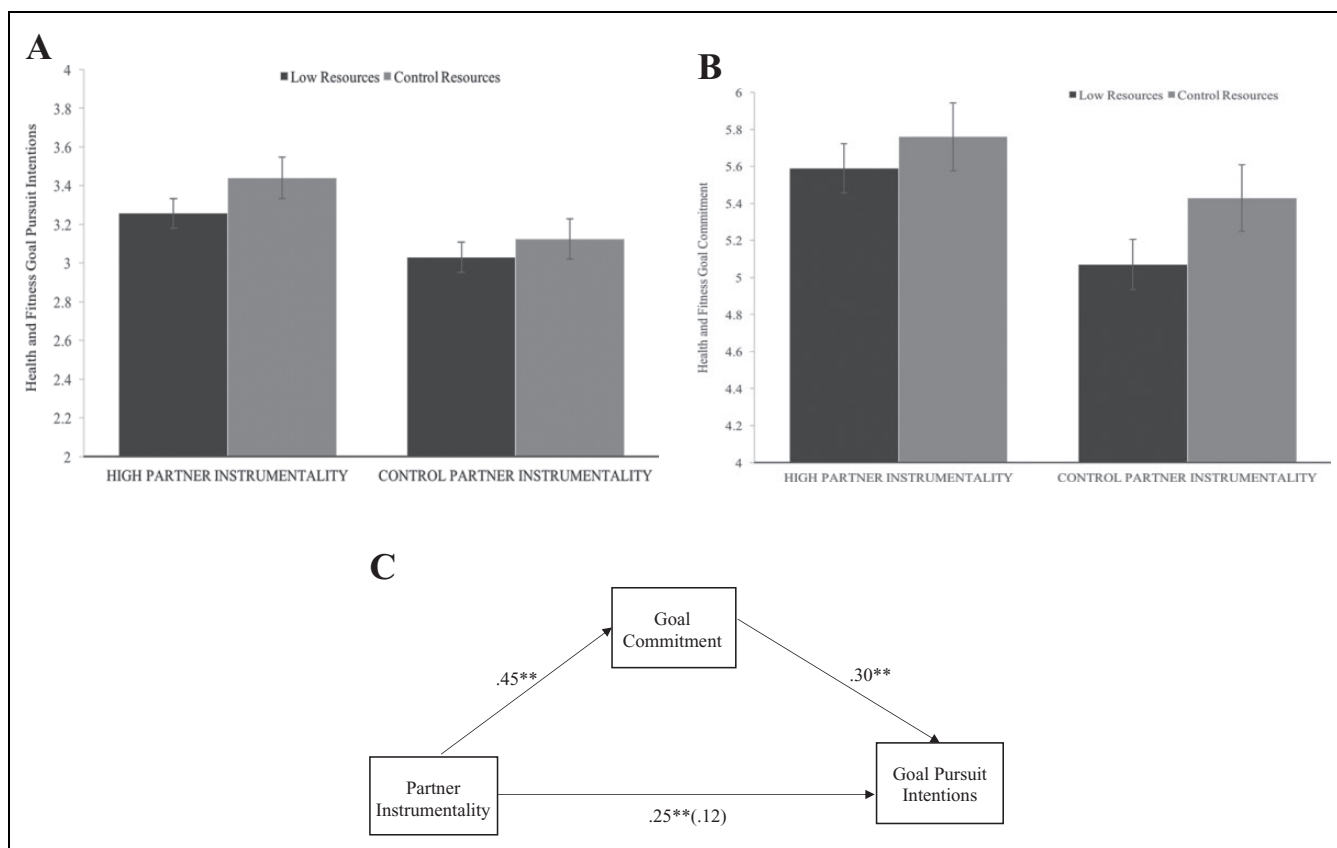


Figure 2. (a) Goal pursuit intentions as a function of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and amount of resources (low vs. control) in Study 2. Participants with instrumental partners planned to pursue their health and fitness goal to a greater extent than those in the control instrumentality condition. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (b) Goal commitment as a function of partner instrumentality (high vs. control) and amount of resources (low vs. control) in Study 2. Participants with instrumental partners had significantly greater commitment to their health and fitness goal than those in the control instrumentality condition. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (c) The effects of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions via goal commitment in Study 2. Unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed above; the direct effect of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions was no longer significant when goal commitment was included in the model. The indirect effect of instrumentality condition on goal pursuit intentions was 0.13 ($SE = .05$), which was statistically significant, 95% confidence interval [.0471, .2389]. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

health and fitness goal. In this way, reminders of helpful partners can thus serve to motivate individuals to work harder in their own goal pursuit.

Study 3

Given the disconnect between the social support literature and the original outsourcing findings (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011) and in line with goal pursuit literature that suggests the same action (partner support) can be perceived as goal progress or goal commitment, with different consequences for goal pursuit (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005), Study 3 investigated the possibility that the type of partner support (instrumental vs. emotional) may influence when partners bolster (vs. undermine) goal pursuit. We conducted an experimental study with type of support (instrumental vs. emotional) and gender (male vs. female) as the independent variables. Goal commitment and goal pursuit intentions, operationalized identically to Studies 1 and 2, were the dependent variables of interest.

In line with social support research suggesting that instrumental support is particularly helpful for advancing fitness goals (Siceloff et al., 2013), we hypothesized that instrumental support (in which a partner *does something* concrete to advance a goal; Cutrona, 1990; Semmer et al., 2008) rather than *emotional* support (in which a partner expresses validation and warmth) would be particularly relevant for enhancing one’s goal pursuit intentions. Furthermore, we expected this effect to be mediated by goal commitment; specifically, we hypothesized that instrumental (vs. emotional) support would result in greater goal commitment, which would in turn increase goal pursuit intentions.

Finally, although Studies 1 and 2 recruited women exclusively, based on the notion that women are socialized to accept perceived support more so than men (Landman-Peeters et al., 2005), Study 3 recruited both genders and tested this assumption directly. It may be the case that women are more receptive to social support provision; women have been shown to draw social support from more people compared to men, who

Table 6. Analysis of Variance Results for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Support Type and Gender in Study 3.

Variables	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	η_p^2
DV: Goal pursuit intentions						
Support type	0.14	1	0.14	0.16	.691	.001
Gender	1.66	1	1.66	1.87	.172	.006
Support Type \times Gender	0.64	1	0.64	0.72	.397	.002
Error	264.49	299	0.89			
Total	7,852.00	303				
Corrected total	267.00	302				
DV: Goal commitment						
Support type	0.34	1	0.34	0.42	.520	.001
Gender	0.24	1	0.24	0.29	.590	.001
Support Type \times Gender	8.00	1	8.00	9.86	.002**	.032**
Error	242.69	299	0.81			
Total	12,078.50	303				
Corrected total	251.94	302				
Simple effects: Gender _{Male}	2.63	1	2.63	3.24	.073	
Error	242.69	299	0.81			
Simple effects: Gender _{Female}	5.74	1	5.74	7.08	.008**	
Error	242.69	299	0.81			

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

typically draw support mostly from their romantic partners (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010; Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2006). Thus, we expected that the mediated effect of support type on goal pursuit intentions would only hold for women, because of their increased propensity to have and use social support.

Method

Based on calculations using G*Power (Version 3.1; estimated effect size of $f = .20$, numerator $df = 1$, and number of groups = 4), the total participants needed to achieve 90% power were 265. As Study 3 was not a direct replication, we reasoned that achieving 90% power would be sufficient for detecting an effect. To be certain that enough surveys would be complete for data analysis, a total of 306 participants in committed relationships were recruited using Amazon's Mechanical Turk. However, three participants failed to give an example of how their partner was supportive for a health and fitness goal. Thus, these participants were excluded from analysis. Data from 303 participants were analyzed. Of these, 171 were female, with a mean age of 35.19 ($SD = 10.66$; see Table 1).

Procedure

To manipulate the type of support, participants wrote down one way that their partner was *instrumentally* supportive of a health and fitness goal (instrumental partner condition) or one way that their partner was *emotionally supportive* of a health and fitness goal (emotional support condition). Specifically, in the instrumental support condition, participants were instructed to list an example of how their partner does something *concrete* to help them advance their health and fitness goal. In the emotional support condition, participants were instructed to provide

an example of how their partners are emotionally supportive and *say things* or *discuss* their goals with them in a way that helps advance their health and fitness goals. Subsequently, participants rated their goal commitment in a manner identical to Studies 1 and 2. As in the previous studies, these items were averaged to create an index of goal commitment ($r = .711$, $p < .001$). Finally, to assess intentions to engage in goal pursuit, participants rated the amount of time and energy/effort they were planning to spend on health and fitness in the upcoming week, on a scale of 1 (*much less than usual*) to 5 (*much more than usual*); these items were averaged to create an index of goal pursuit intentions ($r = .826$, $p < .001$).

Results

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the effect of support type (instrumental vs. emotional) and gender (male vs. female) on goal pursuit intentions. No significant main effects of support-type condition or gender emerged for goal pursuit intentions (see Table 6). Participants with instrumentally supportive partners planned to spend approximately the same amount of time and effort on health and fitness as participants with emotionally supportive partners, and men planned to spend approximately the same amount of time and effort on health and fitness as women (see Table 7). There was no significant interaction between gender and support type on goal pursuit intentions (see Figure 3a).

Another two-way ANOVA was conducted to test the effect of support type (instrumental vs. emotional) and gender (male vs. female) on goal commitment. No significant main effects of support-type condition or gender emerged for goal commitment. However, there was a significant interaction between gender and support type on goal commitment (see Table 6). Simple effects analysis showed that among women, there was significantly greater goal commitment in the instrumental

Table 7. Means, SDs, SEs, 95% CIs, and Cohen’s *d* for Goal Pursuit Intentions and Goal Commitment as a Function of Support Type and Gender in Study 3.

Variables	Instrumental Support				Emotional Support				Cohen’s <i>d</i>	95% CI for <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		
DV: Goal pursuit intentions										
Support-type main effect	4.99	1.04	.08	[4.83, 5.14]	5.03	.83	.08	[4.88, 5.18]	.043	[-.183, .268]
Male	5.01	0.94	.12	[4.78, 5.26]	5.15	.85	.11	[4.94, 5.37]	.157	[-.186, .500]
Female	4.96	1.11	.10	[4.76, 5.16]	4.91	.80	.10	[4.71, 5.11]	.052	[-.248, .351]
DV: Goal commitment										
Support-type main effect	6.28	0.96	.08	[6.13, 6.43]	6.21	.86	.07	[6.06, 6.35]	.077	[-.148, .302]
Male	6.14	1.13	.12	[5.91, 6.37]	6.40	.77	.11	[6.19, 6.61]	.274	[-.071, .618]
Female	6.41	0.81	.10	[6.22, 6.60]	6.02	.90	.10	[5.82, 6.21]	.456**	[-.152, .760]

Note. CI = confidence interval.
 p* < .05. *p* < .01.

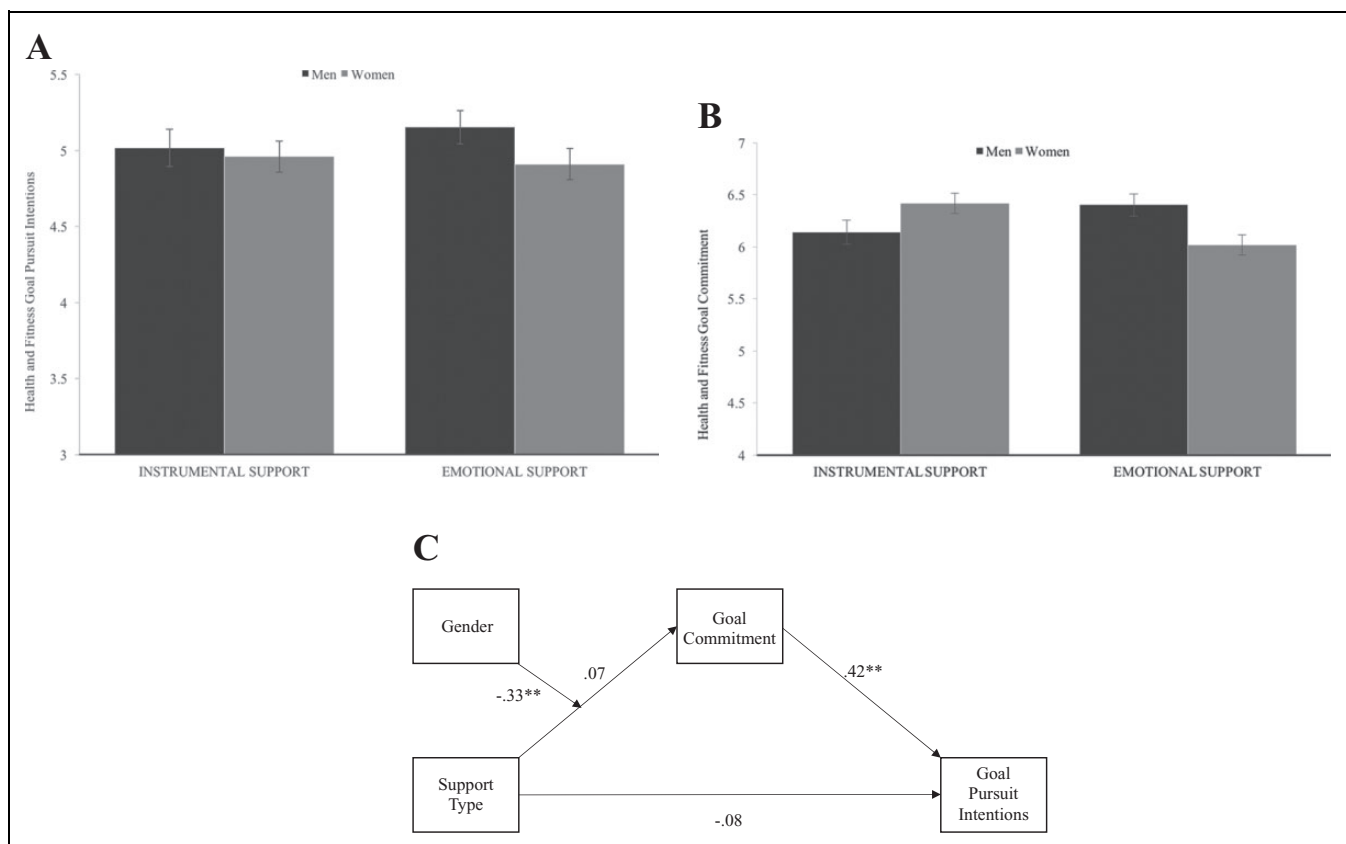


Figure 3. (a) Health and fitness goal pursuit intentions as a function of partner support type (emotional vs. instrumental) and gender (men vs. women) in Study 3. There were no significant main effects or interactions of support type and gender on goal pursuit intentions. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (b) Health and fitness goal commitment as a function of partner support type (emotional vs. instrumental) and gender (men vs. women) in Study 3. Women with instrumentally supportive partners had significantly greater health goal commitment than women with emotionally supportive partners. Men did not significantly differ in their goal commitment as a function of support type. Error bars are ± 1 SE. (c) The effects of perceived support type on goal pursuit intentions via goal commitment, moderated by gender in Study 3. Unstandardized regression coefficients are displayed. The indirect effect of support-type condition on goal pursuit intentions via goal commitment for women was 0.17 (*SE* = .05), which was statistically significant, 95% confidence interval [.0684, .2836]. No significant indirect effects were observed for men. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01.

support condition than in the emotional support condition. Among men, goal commitment did not significantly differ as a function of support type (see Table 7 and Figure 3b).

Although there were no significant direct effects of support type on goal pursuit intentions or goal commitment, we proceeded with a moderated mediation analysis using the

PROCESS macro (Model 7) in SPSS with 10,000 bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2013) to test the idea that perceived instrumental partner support enhances goal commitment for women (but not men), which in turn increases goal pursuit intentions. Instrumental support was coded as 2 and emotional support was coded as 1, for ease of interpretability, with larger regression coefficients corresponding to greater partner instrumentality. Gender was effects coded (*men* = 1, *women* = -1). Moderated mediation results revealed that instrumental (vs. emotional) support did indeed increase goal commitment for women only, which in turn increased women's goal pursuit intentions; the index of moderated mediation was -0.28 ($SE = .09$, 95% confidence interval [CI] [-.4738, -.1118]). A significant indirect effect of support type on goal pursuit intentions via goal commitment was observed for women (indirect effect = .17, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [.0684, .2836]) but not for men (indirect effect = -.11, $SE = .07$, 95% CI [-.2719, .0205]; see Figure 3c).

Discussion

Three studies tested the effects of perceived partner support on goal commitment and goal pursuit intentions. Although extensive research suggests that close others may boost goal pursuit, there is evidence that, under certain circumstances, relying on others may in fact undermine one's goal pursuit intentions. The current research attempted to reconcile these inconsistencies and explore the conditions under which partner support may enhance or decrease goal pursuit intentions, as well as explore the mechanisms underlying this effect.

Our findings demonstrate that thinking of supportive partners (i.e., how a partner may help with one's health and fitness goals) bolsters one's goal pursuit intentions (i.e., the amount of time and effort one plans to invest in pursuing health and fitness goals in the upcoming week). These results are in line with research on social support, which suggests that perceived support from significant others can bolster goal pursuit (Brunstein et al., 1996; Feeney, 2004; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). Furthermore, they are consistent with research on goal pursuit (Fishbach & Dhar, 2005; Kruglanski et al., 2002), which indicates that certain actions (i.e., a partner's support/help) may be perceived as goal commitment and may result in subsequent actions that further advance the same goal.

Relying on others to facilitate one's personal goal pursuits may be particularly beneficial, given that people have limited regulatory resources (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998; Baumeister et al., 2007). In line with this notion, in Study 1, we found that thinking of an instrumental partner boosts goal pursuit intentions, especially when one's cognitive resources are depleted. This may happen because the availability of a partner who could help with one's goals may alleviate the negative effect that being depleted or exhausted has on expectancy of goal attainment. However, we failed to replicate this finding in Study 2, which might indicate that the effect of resources is not very robust. Furthermore, although resources moderated the effect of partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions in Study 1, we did not find an effect on goal

commitment. Although only a speculation, it is possible that the effect of partner instrumentality on goal commitment would not be dependent on cognitive resources, if a partner's instrumental support was perceived to provide sufficient resources for goal pursuit in and of itself (Kruglanski et al., 2012). However, given the inconsistent pattern of findings, the effects of resources should be interpreted cautiously at this point.

Finally, the type of support matters; the research reported here reveals that instrumental support, relative to emotional support, is particularly important for increasing goal commitment and therefore for increasing one's goal pursuit intentions. It should be noted that emotional support may be considered instrumental in some circumstances (i.e., discussing challenges for goal pursuit with a partner, which may bolster motivation); however, our results suggest that goal commitment and goal pursuit intentions are bolstered more when a partner *does* something supportive, compared to when a partner *says* something supportive.

The effect of partner instrumentality on goal pursuit intentions only held for women. We are speculating here, but we suggest that this may be the case because women are socialized to value warmth and interpersonal connectedness (Olson & Shultz, 1994), whereas men are socialized to value autonomy and independence. Thus, women may be more comfortable accepting support from others and may in turn benefit more from perceived social support for goal pursuit. Although the present studies only examined social support that participants acknowledged, it may also be important to consider how *invisible* social support can affect goal pursuit intentions (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000).

To conclude, in three well-powered studies, we consistently demonstrated that partner instrumentality can both directly and indirectly boost goal pursuit intentions. The results are in line with the empirical findings of social support research as well as with the theoretical notions from the goal pursuit literature. However, it is important to note several limitations of the present studies and to discuss the implications and potential future directions. First, all three studies were conducted on Amazon's Mechanical Turk, which tempers the confidence that results are broadly generalizable (cf. Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Second, participants in Studies 1 and 2 were more likely to be excluded in the "low resources" condition for failing to follow instructions, which challenges the assumption of random assignment. Third, Study 3 did not have a control condition; thus, the effects of emotional versus instrumental support should be interpreted with caution. Another threat to generalizability of the current findings is the fact that this research focused exclusively on health and fitness goals. Although these are important goals (i.e., Kopetz, Faber, Fishbach, & Kruglanski, 2011), it is important to extend this research to other types of goals that people pursue (i.e., one's career) and also examine goal pursuit *behavior* in addition to goal pursuit intentions.

While our findings failed to replicate the outsourcing self-regulation findings of Fitzsimons and Finkel (2011), there are theoretical reasons to believe that a partner's support could

be, under certain circumstances, perceived as goal progress rather than goal commitment. This could lead to “goal switching” rather than to “goal persistence” that was found in the studies reported above. Future studies should examine the conditions under which perceived partner support may indeed be substitutable for one’s own effort and may therefore undermine goal pursuit.

Authors’ Note

Research materials are accessible at <https://osf.io/wknd3/>.

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