GOAL VARIABILITY IN SERIAL ARGUMENTATION: A DYADIC SEQUENTIAL

ANALYSIS

by

TIMOTHY RYAN WORLEY

(Under the Direction of Jennifer A. Samp)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined associations between variability and incongruity in interactants' goals, messages and conflict outcomes during serial argumentation. Seventy-five heterosexual romantic couples engaged in a ten-minute video-recorded discussion of a real-life, ongoing relational argument. Following discussions, each member of the dyad individually reviewed video of the interaction and reported the salience of self, partner, relationship, and task goals at one-minute intervals. Goal variability was conceptualized as the overall degree of variation in individuals' goals across the course of an interaction. Females' self- and task goal variability, along with males' partner goal variability, had negative linear associations with male perceptions of conflict resolution; these associations were not observed for females' perceptions of resolution. Goal incongruity, defined as discrepancy between partners' goal ratings at the same time point, was not generally associated with conflict resolution or incidence of dyadic demand-withdrawal conflict patterns. Finally, individuals' goals at one minute were associated with some partner goals at the next minute. However, contrary to predictions, these associations were not mediated by individuals' verbal messages.

INDEX WORDS: Goals, Conflict, Serial Argumentation, Goal Variability, Goal Incongruity, Romantic Relationships, Conflict Resolution, Demand-Withdrawal Communication

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DEDICATION

       This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, William Gladstone Cunningham, who inspired my love of learning and encouraged me so much throughout my academic career. I know you would have been proud to see your grandson complete his dissertation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Conflict is a normal feature of virtually all close relationships (Folger et al., 2001). While single conflict episodes may have significant impacts on close relationships (e.g., Siegert & Stamp, 1994), at times conflicts about particular issues may extend beyond single episodes (Trapp & Hoff, 1985). Indeed, many individuals report that their conflict episodes frequently end without significant resolution (Benoit & Benoit, 1987; Lloyd, 1987), and these conflicts often re-emerge in subsequent episodes (Bevan, 2010). Johnson and Roloff (1998) defined conflicts that occur between known partners at two or more time periods as *serial arguments*. Research suggests that partners in intimate relationships average around three to four distinct, ongoing serial arguments (Hale, Mongeau, Tighe, & Ficara, 1995; Johnson & Roloff, 1998). In one study (Bevan, 2010), participants reported that their serial conflicts lasted an average of over two years, involved an average of 22 episodes, and remained unresolved in over half of cases.

Serial arguments have detrimental effects at both the individual and relational levels (Johnson, Averbeck, Kelley, & Liu, 2011; Johnson & Roloff, 1998). Communicatively, serial arguments often take the form of demand/withdrawal conflict patterns (Malis & Roloff, 2006). A demand/withdrawal pattern occurs when an individual seeks to influence or criticize his or her partner, while the partner seeks to avoid discussion of the issue (Christensen & Heavey, 1993). These demand/withdrawal patterns have been associated with increased relational distress and dissatisfaction (Caughlin, 2002; Christensen & Shenk, 1991). More specifically, Malis and Roloff (2006) observed that self-demand/partner-withdrawal patterns in serial conflict were associated with intrusive thoughts and affect about the conflict-inducing issue, with heightened

stress and with interference in daily routines due to negative impacts of the conflict on physical health.

While it would seem plausible that engaging in more frequent argumentative episodes would negatively impact relational quality, in fact this does not appear to be the case. In past research, frequency of serial arguments was not significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, commitment, or stability (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). On the other hand, perceived resolvability of the conflict has emerged as one of the most salient predictors of relational quality in the context of serial argumentation (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). *Perceived resolvability* refers to the belief that partners are making progress toward resolving a given conflict. Prior research has observed that perceived resolvability has a greater impact on relational quality than does the frequency of serial argument episodes (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). Perceived resolvability is negatively associated with the likelihood of demand/withdrawal patterns, as well as with stress and intrusive thoughts about conflicts (Malis & Roloff, 2006), and with rumination about the conflict both prior to and following episodes (Johnson & Roloff, 1998; with exception, see Bevan et al., 2008).

With regard to specific communication behaviors, perceived resolvability is negatively associated with avoiding communication about the conflict (Bevan et al., 2007; Reznik & Roloff, 2010). Perceived resolvability has also been associated with decreased use of negative conflict tactics (such as counter-complaining and demand/withdrawal patterns) in initial confrontations (Johnson & Roloff, 1998), as well as with increases in relationally-confirming behaviors (e.g., assurances of love and commitment) (Johnson & Roloff, 2000). Finally, perceived resolvability is negatively associated with the predictability of both the onset of and a partner's communication during serial argument episodes (Johnson & Roloff, 1998). In total, these results

paint a portrait in which serial arguments that are perceived as relatively unresolvable are associated with a host of relational, psychological, and physical maladies, while conflicts seen as resolvable are perceived to be generally less damaging and to promote more open communication. Thus, examining factors that contribute to perceived resolvability may be an important step in alleviating the relational and personal damage often associated with serial arguments.

Although past research has uncovered important associations between perceived resolvability and sub-optimal serial argumentation processes (e.g., demand/withdrawal patterns; argument predictability; stress; rumination, etc.), these associations have been correlational in nature. As such, the degree to which perceived resolvability actively contributes to serial argumentation processes, rather than simply reflecting the reality of more difficult arguments or argumentation processes, is still unclear. In short: Is it simply that more negative argumentation contributes to lower perceptions of resolvability, or do the perceptions that individuals bring to argumentation episodes actually help to shape the unfolding of the episodes? Admittedly, the *serial* nature of serial arguments suggests that influence likely runs in both directions: more difficult arguments contribute to perceptions of decreased resolvability, and these perceptions themselves influence subsequent argumentative episodes. While a full examination of this question is beyond the scope of the current project, one aim of the project is to explore the over-time associations between argument processes and perceived resolvability. The project focuses on one aspect of the serial argumentation process, namely, the role of interaction goals in shaping argument features and outcomes. In the section that follows, I discuss the ways in which partners' multiple goals, and variability in those goals, may influence communicative and relational features of serial argumentation.

The Nature of Goals in Conflict

Conflict frequently arises when individuals infer that their goals are incompatible with their partner's goals (Canary, 2003; Folger, et al., 2001). Thus, an investigation of goals is essential to understanding the interpersonal conflict process. Over the past several decades, communication scholars have given increasing attention to the importance of goals in shaping interpersonal communication episodes (e.g., Wilson & Feng, 2007). Goals refer to "future states of affairs that an individual is committed to achieving or attaining" (Dillard, 2004, p. 185). Communication goals are typically understood to take the form of *instrumental* (or *task*) *goals* (concerned with accomplishing a particular task); *relational goals* (pertaining to establishing, maintaining, or transforming a relationship with another individual); or *identity goals* (related to managing one's own or a partners' self-image and identity) (Clark & Delia, 1979).

Prior research has typically treated instrumental, relational and tasks goals as clearly distinguishable from each other. This is likely to be the case in relatively straightforward influence contexts between non-intimate communicators. For instance, attempting to convince a stranger to adopt a particular political position (e.g., an instrumental goal) bears no *necessary* relationship to one's concerns for protecting one's own identity, the other party's identity, or the relationship between the two communicators. However, I argue that the common distinction between instrumental, identity and relational goals is likely to be less useful in research on communication in close relationships, compared to straightforward influence contexts (e.g., Dillard, 1990).

In the context in close relational discussions, the relational, identity and instrumental qualities of interaction goals are likely to be confounded. For instance, the instrumental goal of determining which partner should take out the trash is also likely to be confounded with identity

goals (e.g., the desire to avoid appearing unfair) and relational goals (e.g., maintaining an equitable relationship). Likewise, the "identity" goal of avoiding the appearance of unfairness is linked to the "relational" goal of maintaining equity. This example illustrates the ways in which, in close relationships, task, identity and relational goals may be inextricably tied to one another. Accordingly, I argue that it may be more helpful to conceptualize task, identity and relational concerns as *dimensions* of relational communication goals, rather than orthogonal *categories* of communicative goals. That said, relational communication goals may nevertheless have a particular "flavor," emphasizing a particular dimension(s) over others.

In line with this conceptualization, in the discussion that follows I adopt Samp's (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013) framework, according to which individuals may pursue four types of goals: *task goals*, *self-goals, other-focused goals,* and *relationship-focused goals*. This framework should not be interpreted to imply that the presence of a particular goal focus excludes the others; given the intermingled nature of goals in close relationship discussions, this is unlikely to occur. Rather, these categories reflect areas of *emphasis* within the goal structure.

<center>**Goal Variability during Conflict**</center>

Not only does perceived goal incompatibility often *precipitate* conflict (Canary, 2003), but partners may also act in ways *during* conflict that interfere with a partner's goal pursuit (Roloff, 1987). Dillard (2004) suggested that a partner's resistance to one's primary influence goal may lead one to redouble efforts to achieve the primary goal, with less concern for secondary goals (e.g., politeness). This dynamic is observed in the "rebuff phenomenon" (Hample & Dallinger, 1998), in which a partner's resistance to influence leads to more aggressive pursuit of one's initial influence goal. However, in some cases interference with goal pursuit leads individuals to alter their goals altogether during interaction (Berger, 1997; Turk &

Monahan, 1999). Furthermore, goals that are initially secondary may become primary during the course of the interaction (Dillard, 2004), such as when the desire to defend one's self-concept from attack takes relative precedence over resolving an instrumental conflict (Gottman, 1994; Hample & Dallinger, 1995). Sequential analyses of goal variability during interaction demonstrate that, not only does the importance of individuals' goals vary during the course of relational discussions (Keck & Samp, 2007; Waldron, 1997), but goal shifts vary systematically as a function of both individuals' own prior goals and the content of partner's messages (Samp, 2013).

Research suggests that during conflict, individuals may de-emphasize their initial primary goals to subsequently allow secondary goals to predominate, even if they are counterproductive to the achievement of the primary goal (Berger, 1995; Hample & Dallinger, 1995; Ohbuchi, Chiba, & Fukashima, 1996). This dynamic is observed, for instance, in conflict behaviors such as defensiveness and kitchen-sinking, in which perceived threats to oneself derail focus on the primary conflict goal and lead to ineffective, and often damaging, conflict tactics (Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, & Markman, 1976).

Further, given the manner in which plans are linked to particular goals (Dillard, 2004; Berger, 1997), goal shifts may impede online planning. The interlinked nature of goals and message plans suggests that while goal shifts are a common experience in conflict (Keck & Samp, 2007), they may be detrimental to partners' ability to resolve conflict issues. Turk and Monahan (1999) examined repetitive non-optimal behaviors (RNOs) during conflict. RNOs refer to behaviors that individuals believe to be ineffective and/or undesirable, but nevertheless find themselves enacting repeatedly during interactions. Turk and Monahan observed that individuals who reported engaging in RNOs during conflict were more likely to report that their goals

shifted during the course of the conflict, as well as to perceive greater degrees of identity threats and negative affect, they experienced greater degrees of goal shift compared to individuals who engaged in conflicts not characterized by RNOs. Turk and Monahan assessed goal shift in a dichotomous manner: did individuals' goals shift, or did they not? More recent work has emphasized, instead, the dynamic nature of shifting goals throughout interactions (e.g., Keck & Samp, 1997; Samp, 2013). Nevertheless, Turk and Monahan's results lend credence to the notion that goal shifts during conflict may impede individuals' ability to successfully negotiate the issues at hand. Given the likelihood that shifting goals will complicate online planning (Berger, 1997), too much goal variability during an interaction is likely to negatively impact perceived resolvability of the conflict. Accordingly, I predict:

 H1: Goal variability during conflict will be negatively associated with conflict resolution.

 At the same time, it is possible that in some cases, goal variability may contribute to more effective conflict negotiation. Effective communication is a dyadic achievement, requiring coordination by both partners (Burgoon, Stern, & Dillman, 1995); accordingly, the ability to infer and adapt to a partner's goals and behavior is likely to be important for successful conflict negotiation (Bates & Samp, 2011; Berger, 2000; Lakey & Canary, 2002). Research on planning and message production has illustrated that having too both too many and too few plans is detrimental to communication competence; a moderate amount of planning appears to be optimal (Berger, Karol, & Jordan, 1989; Strickland & Samp, in press). Analogously, I argue that while too much variability in interaction goals is predicted to be counterproductive for conflict resolution (H1), low levels of variability may also be counterproductive, as they may reflect that someone is insufficiently attentive to his or her partner's concerns and behaviors. As such, I predict that while there will be a negative linear association between goal variability and conflict

resolution (H1), there will also be a curvilinear association between goal variability and conflict resolution. I posit:

H2: Goal variability during conflict will have a curvilinear association with conflict resolution, such that conflict resolution will be highest at moderate levels of goal variability.

Goal Incongruity in Conflict

One criticism of goal-based approaches to human communication is the charge that prevailing theories conceive interaction goals, message production, and message processing through an individualistic, overly-psychological paradigm (e.g., Lannamann, 1991; Shepherd, 1998). Critics of goal-based programs of research have emphasized the situated, negotiated nature of meaning between interactants as constitutive of goals; that is, individuals do not so much bring definitions of communicative situations and goals to their interactions, as work together to dynamically co-construct the nature of their relationships and interactions (Shepherd, 1998). Dillard and Schrader (1998) responded to this criticism by noting (correctly, in my view) that a recognition of the socially-coordinated nature of goal formulation does not, in itself, invalidate the importance of individuals' goals *once formulated*.

At the same time, an insistence on the socially-coordinated nature of interaction goals highlights the importance of considering both interactants' perspectives. Because conflict is rooted in perceptions of incompatible goals (Canary, 2003), the successful resolution of the conflict is likely to be impeded unless partners are able to bring their goals into congruity with one another's. If partners' primary goals differ, partners may have difficulty achieving a coordinated resolution of the conflict. This likely applies when partners hold incongruous primary goals upon entering the interaction. Initial goals for an interaction are believed to "bracket," or define, the focus of that interaction (Dillard et al., 1989; Wilson, 2002). To the

extent that individuals's pre-interaction goals are incongruous, their pursuit of inconsistent aims may make the mutual achievement of each partner's goals less likely. Additionally, regardless of the congruity/incongruity of individuals pre-interaction goals, the exigencies of dyadic communication often lead to shifts in goal priority during interactions (Keck & Samp, 2007; Turk & Monahan, 1999). To the extent that partners' goals *become* incongruous at a given time point during the course of the interaction, their ability to satisfactorily resolve an argument is likely to be impeded. It is predicted that the greater the degree of moment-by-moment goal incongruity during a conflict interaction, the less likely the partners are resolve the conflict. Accordingly, I argue:

H3: Partners' primary goal incongruity (a) prior to interactions; and (b) during interactions will be negatively associated with conflict resolution.

Furthermore, it is possible that the frequently-observed demand-withdrawal pattern of conflict (e.g., Christensen & Heavey, 1990) may in some cases be tied to partners' divergent goals. Caughlin and Scott (2010) argued that multiple goals *within* an individual may create communicative complexities during influence attempts, leading them to make demands of a partner (e.g., sacrificing appropriateness due to instrumental concerns) or to avoid communication (e.g., subordinating instrumental goals to identity/relational goals). Additionally, although Caughlin and Scott did not emphasize this as a primary point of their study, they observed that interactions defined by high levels of demand-withdrawal frequently involved the partners pursuing incongruent goals. Indeed, it seems likely that there are two possible pathways via which goal incongruity might lead to demand-withdrawal behaviors. First, partners' (incongruous) goals might be associated with different action tendencies, such as the desire to influence a partner (i.e., approach orientation) versus the desire to avoid being influenced (i.e.,

avoidance orientation). Additionally, given the manner in which primary goals define communicator's understandings of the nature of an interaction (Dillard et al., 1989), it is possible that in some cases partners might disagree on the extent to which continued communication about an issue is desirable. If one partner believes his or her primary goal has been satisfied (or set aside), he or she is likely to view further discussion as unnecessary and may be more likely to withdraw from influence attempts. Conversely, the other partner, who holds a different primary goal (which may not have been satisfactorily achieved), may continue to pursue in hopes of attaining his or her goal, and thus enact demanding behaviors. Thus, incongruity between partners' primary goals may be associated with increased difficulty in resolving conflicts, as well as with increased likelihood of demand-withdrawal conflict patterns. I predict:

H4: Partners' primary goal incongruity (a) prior to interactions; and (b) during interactions will be positively associated with incidence of demand-withdrawal patterns during conflict.

Goal Inferences in Conflict

Research on conflict and argumentation frequently highlights the role of individuals' own goals in shaping interactions (e.g., Bevan et al., 2004; Keck & Samp, 2007). However, individuals not only formulate goals, but also infer their partners' goals (Palomares, 2009). While individuals are usually cognizant of multiple primary and secondary goals for their own behaviors (Wilson & Feng, 2007), they most often infer single primary goals for partners' behaviors, while downplaying the importance of partners' multiple and secondary goals (Palomares, 2008). Inferring a partner's internal states may play an important role in interpersonal conflict. Bates and Samp (2011) observed that *perceived empathic accuracy* (i.e., the perception that partners understood one another's intentions accurately) was positively

associated with conflict resolution for both relationally-focused serial arguments and non-relational arguments. Lakey and Canary (2002) found that sensitivity to a partner's goals in conflict was associated with partners' ratings of individuals' communication competence. While these studies (Bates & Samp, 2011; Lakey & Canary, 2002) have examined individuals' perceptions of sensitivity to one another's goals, little research has examined the precise nature of the dynamic relationship between actors' and partners' respective goals during interaction (with exception see Samp, 2013).

Palomares (2009) suggested that inferring that a partner holds a particular goal may encourage one to adopt that goal oneself (see also Aarts & Hassin, 2005). For instance, inferring that a partner desires to pursue relational goals may engender one's own reciprocal pursuit of relational goals, while inferring that a partner wants to pursue instrumental goals might lead one to focus more on instrumental goals. Samp (2013; also Keck & Samp, 2007) observed that features of individuals' messages at one time interval were associated with their partners' goals at the next time interval. Self-focused messages were associated with a partner's rating self-focused goals more important at the next minute, while relationship-focused messages were associated with a partner's rating relational goals as more important in the subsequent minute, and task-focused messages were linked with a partner's rating of task or relational goals at the next minute. Although Samp did not examine the link between partners' goals directly, it seems likely that message focus mediates the association between individuals' goals and partners' subsequent goals. It is likely not only that individuals' messages reflect their underlying goals (Keck & Samp, 2007), but also that these messages, reflective of individuals' goals, influence their partners' subsequent goals, as suggested by the goal contagion perspective (Palomares, 2009; 2013). Accordingly, I predict:

H5: Individuals' ratings of goal importance at one time interval will be positively associated with partners' ratings of the same goal at the next time interval.

H6: (a) Individuals' goals will be reflected in their verbal message focus during the same time interval; and (b) verbal message focus will mediate the association between individuals' ratings of goal importance at one time interval and partners' ratings of goal importance at the next interval.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Participants and Argument Characteristics

83 romantically-involved couples from the undergraduate research pool at the University of Georgia were recruited for the study. Participants were eligible if they defined their relationship as "romantic" in nature (as defined by the partners). Further, both partners had to agree upon the existence of at least one ongoing serial argument in their relationship. Couples who were unable to report the existence of at least one such argument were excluded from final analyses, although participants in such couples still received benefits related to participation (i.e., research credit).

75 of the dyads were heterosexual; two couples were same-sex, and six couples did not provide information on the sex of both partners. As the small size of these groups precluded separate analyses, these dyads were excluded from final data analysis, yielding a final sample of 75 heterosexual couples. Age of participants ranged from 18 to 28 years ($M = 19.95$ years, $SD = 2.01$) and the average length of relationships was 12.85 months ($SD = 12.60$ months). With regard to the topic of discussion, the average duration of the selected arguments was nearly five months ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 5.56$ months), and participants reported an average of slightly more than seven discrete argumentative episodes about the selected topic ($M = 7.48$, $SD = 7.29$).

Procedures

Identification of Conflict

Couples' serial argument topics were identified utilizing procedures adapted from the Marital Agendas Protocol (Notarius & Vanzetti, 1987). Participants were separated prior to

completing this task. Participants first read a definition of serial arguments, taken from Johnson and Roloff (1998, p. 333):

> "A *serial argument* exists when individuals argue or engage in conflict about the same topic over time, during which they participate in several (at least two) arguments about the topic" (emphasis added).

After reading this definition, participants were provided a sheet of paper and asked to list up to five current serial arguments in their relationship, and report on the current (i.e., pre-discussion) level of resolution for each argument listed. Following this task, participants were reunited, and guided by the researcher through a discussion to mutually select an argument they were comfortable discussing in the laboratory setting.

Interaction

Upon selection of the discussion topic, couples were instructed to engage in a discussion of the issue for up to 10 minutes. Upon selection of the discussion topic, couples were instructed to engage in a discussion of the issue for up to 10 minutes. Couples were directed to use this time to try to achieve resolution of the conflict. Couples signaled to the researcher when, by mutual agreement, they considered the discussion completed. Prior research (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013) has found 10 minutes to be a sufficient, but not overly-taxing, time frame for relational discussions. Interactions were digitally recorded by the researcher from behind a one-way mirror.

Participant Coding

Participants' ratings of goal importance were assessed using a video-assisted recall, self-report methodology (Ickes, Robertson, Tooke & Teng, 1986; Waldron, 1990). This method has been used frequently in past research on communication goals (e.g., Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp,

2013; Waldron, 1997). It should be emphasized that although individuals may not be consciously aware of their goals at all times (Dillard, 2004; Kellerman, 1992), goals nevertheless appear to be accessible to individuals' conscious awareness upon prompted reflection (Dillard, 2004; Keck & Samp, 2007; Waldron, 1997; Wilson & Feng, 2007). Accordingly, the current study prompted participants at one-minute intervals to reflect on and report their goals during successive periods of the interaction

Following the interaction, participants were taken to separate rooms to watch the recording of the discussion. Participants were instructed to stop the recording at one-minute intervals and respond to measures of the priority of various goals during that interval. Consistent with previous research on goal variability (e.g., Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013), one-minute intervals were selected in order to allow sufficient opportunity for capturing goal variability during conversations, without over-taxing participants or unduly inflating error variance, as may occur when intervals are too short (Cohn & Beebe, 1990; Symons, 1992).

Measures

Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution was measured using a single item measure reported by Bates and Samp (2011) in a similar study of conflict. Recent research has suggested that single-item measures may be preferable to multi-item measures when the concept being measured and the language used to describe it are sufficiently concrete and accessible to respondents' understanding (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2009; Rossiter, 2002). For such clearly-defined concepts, well-designed single-item measures are often more valid both conceptually and empirically than multi-item measures based on factor-analytic requirements (Rossiter, 2011; Hayduk & Littvay, 2012), since multi-item measures introduce an added layer of conceptual indeterminacy and

measurement error with each additional item added. In such cases, the traditional requirement of multiple items per construct may actually introduce greater conceptual ambiguity into the meaning of the measure, thus diluting content validity and impeding generalization beyond the original sample that generated the measurement model (Hayduk & Littvay, 2012). As such, sufficiently concrete measures are not necessarily required to conform to the assumptions of classical test theory (e.g., Nunnally, 1978), such as unidimensionality and internal consistency based on factor analytic procedures for multiple items, but must demonstrate clear content validity (Rossiter, 2011).

Based on the considerations above, Bates and Samp's (2011) single-item measure of conflict resolution was selected, as both the concept of "resolution" and the measure's language were deemed sufficiently concrete as to ensure content validity. Prior to the interaction, at each interval during the interaction, and following the interaction, participants responded to the statement, "I consider this issue to be resolved," using a five-point Likert-type scale (1= *not at all*; 5 = *very much so*). For the post-discussion ratings, a one-sample t-test indicated that mean conflict resolution ratings ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.10$) were significantly above the measure mid-point (= 3.0), $t(155) = 8.90$, $p < .001$.

Goal Importance

Importance of four interaction goals was assessed at each one-minute interval. Participants were instructed to stop the video at each one-minute interval and rank the priority of the following goals at that point in the interaction, using items developed by Samp (2013). Items were ranked in an ordinal fashion (*1 = most important*; *4 = least important*). These items were as follows: (1) *Self-oriented* goal: "It was important for me to assert my interest and needs"; (2) *Other-oriented* goal: "It was important for me to make sure that my partner was okay given the

situation"; (3) *Relational* goal: "It was important for me to 'focus on us' and keep my relationship together; and (4) *Task* goal: "It was important for us deal with the issue".

Goal Variability

Goal variability scores were calculated using ANOVA procedures to obtain the within-person sum of squared differences on importance ratings for each goal type (i.e., *self-focused*, *partner-focused*, *relational*, and *task*) across the course of the interaction for each participant (see Locke, 2008, for a similar approach to quantifying goal variability across multiple observations). Because goals at each interval were ranked in an ordinal fashion, calculating the sum of squared differences on each measure allowed us to account for not only the presence, but also the approximate magnitude, of goal shifts. For instance, changing one's rating of the self-focused goal from the most important goal (i.e., 1) in one time interval to the second-most important goal (i.e., 2) in the subsequent time interval represents genuine, yet modest, variability in this goal's salience. Conversely, changing a top-rated goal in one interval to the third- or fourth-rated goal in the subsequent interval reflected a greater degree of goal variability.

Because the sum of squared differences accounts for the magnitude of goal variability (e.g., giving greater weight to a 1-to-4 shift than a 1-to-2 shift), it represents an index of the overall degree of goal variability within the context of a multiple goals framework. Goal variability indices for each goal type were as follows: *self-focused goal* ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 5.03$; min. = 0, max. = 20.40), *partner-focused goal* ($M = 2.49$, $SD = 3.71$; min. = 0, max. = 15.70), *relational goal* ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 3.95$; min. = 0, max. = 20.60), and *task goal* ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 3.83$; min. = 0, max. = 16.60). Independent samples t-tests indicated no differences between males and females on self, partner, and relational goal variability. However, task goal variability

was significantly greater for females ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 4.18$) than for males ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 3.47$), $t(134) = 2.49$, $p < .05$.

Goal Incongruity

In line with my hypotheses (H3-H4), partners' goal incongruity was calculated in two distinct ways. First, *absolute goal incongruity* was calculated based on the presence versus absence of partner's point-by-point agreement about their top rated goals. For instance, if both partners rated the self-focused goal as most important during a given interval, their goals were considered congruent. Conversely, if one partner rated the self-focused goal as most important and his or her partner rated a different goal as most important, their goals were considered incongruent. Goal congruence was indicated using dummy coding (0 = *congruent*; 1 = *incongruent*). Incongruity dummy scores were derived for all four goal types (i.e., *self*, *partner*, *relationship*, and *task*). As a higher score (i.e., 1) indicated the presence of goal incongruity, positive coefficients indicate a positive association between goal incongruity and its associated outcomes.

A second method quantified *relative goal incongruity*. Relative goal incongruity was based on the degree of correspondence in partner's ordinal rankings of each goal. As such, absolute agreement was not necessary to have some degree of congruity. For instance, if Partner A rated the self-focused goal as most important (i.e., 1), and Partner B rated the self-focused goal as second-most important (i.e., 2), their scores would reflect a higher degree of congruence than if Partner B had rated the self-focused goal as least important (i.e., 4). For each goal type, relative goal incongruity was computed by subtracting the first partner's rating from the second partner's rating, and taking the absolute value of the differences.

H3a and H4a related to partners' goal incongruity prior to interactions, while H3b and H4b pertained to goal incongruity during interactions. For pre-interaction goal incongruity, I computed both absolute and relative goal incongruity ratings for participants' baseline (i.e., pre-interaction) goal ratings. As such, pre-interaction goal incongruity scores were based on a single point in time. Conversely, (absolute and relative) goal incongruity during interactions was calculated by computing absolute and relative goal incongruity ratings for each dyad at each interval, and taking the mean of incongruity ratings across all intervals during which the couple interacted.

Message focus

The focus of both partners' verbal messages was assessed by independent raters at one-minute intervals. For each one-minute interval, both partners' verbal messages were rated for the degree of *self-interest*, *partner-interest*, *relationship focus*, and *task focus* displayed. The rating scheme for these dimensions is reported in Appendix C. Due to the large number of message intervals to be rated, a team of four raters were assigned to the data, with each rater assessing one-fourth of the couple interactions; together, the four raters accounted for all interactions (see Samp, 2013 for a similar approach). All raters were blind to the hypotheses.

The rating scheme developed through an iterative process during the course of the data analysis. Initially, raters utilized a categorical coding scheme, consisting of the following categories: *self-focused, partner-focused, relationship-focused,* and *task-focused*. After extensive training and coding practice, pairwise inter-coder reliability was quite poor (i.e., Cohen's kappas were generally less than .40, or negative in a few instances). Upon discussion, coders indicated that several features of the original coding scheme seemed problematic. First, the categorical nature of the coding scheme generated significant decisional uncertainty in instances when

speakers' messages during a given interval indicated the presence of multiple salient verbal focus categories. As intervals were one minute long, in many cases substantial variation in verbal focus occurred during a single minute. In such situations, coders had difficulty choosing the appropriate single code for each minute. Further, given the forced-choice nature of the coding scheme, even minor disagreements about the overall levels of each verbal focus type present during the minute could yield substantial disagreement in the coded data, in light of.

Thus, potential revisions to the coding procedures were considered. In consultation with the coders, a continuous 1-5 rating scale (1 = *very low focus*; 5 = *very high focus*) for each of the four verbal focus types was developed in place of categorical coding. This approach removed the forced-choice decisions required with a categorical scheme, and allowed for the presence of substantial levels of multiple verbal focuses within the same minute. Half of the raters, along with two other trained assistants, evaluated the original four-category verbal focus system (i.e., self-focused, partner-focused, relationship-focused, and task-focused) using the rating scale on 10% of the data. Interrater reliability for this approach was somewhat better, but still insufficient. Feedback from the raters indicated an area of conceptual ambiguity in the two individually-focused categories (i.e., self-focused and partner-focused). During discussion, raters indicated that for the self-focused category it was difficult to distinguish messages that merely emphasized an individuals' own perspective (e.g., "I believe my view is correct") from messages that explicitly emphasized the individuals' own interests (e.g., "I've got to look out for myself here"). For the partner-focused category, raters likewise struggled to differentiate messages directed *toward* a partner (e.g., "You're the one making things so difficult for me!") from messages that were explicitly supportive of the partner's interests (e.g., "I want what's best for you here"). Thus, the self-*focused* and partner-*focused* categories were revised to instead indicate self-

interested and partner-*interested* utterances. This is reflected in the final rating scheme reported in Appendix C.

Upon finalizing the rating scheme used for this study, raters received approximately two hours additional training, after which they coded a reliability subset encompassing 10% of the interactions. Inter-rater reliability for each verbal focus dimension was assessed via a two-way mixed intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), using a consistency criterion for average measures. Following research on interrater-reliability (Bakeman & Quera, 2011; Fleiss, 1986; Mitchell, 1979), reliabilities were evaluated according to the following benchmarks: ICCs less than .40 indicated poor reliability; ICCs between .40 and .70 indicated fair to good reliability; and ICCs greater than .70 indicated excellent reliability. Based on these criteria, ICCs in a reliability sub-set indicated fair to good interrater reliabilities for the verbal focus measures (although reliabilities were generally better for the males' verbal focus ratings than for females'). Obtained reliabilities were as follows: *male self-interest* (ρ = .64); *male partner-interest* (ρ = .71); *male relationship-focus* (ρ = .66); *male task-focus* (ρ = .65); *female self-interest* (ρ = .50); *female partner-interest* (ρ = .43); *female relationship-focus* (ρ = .53); and *female task-focus* (ρ = .78).

Demand-Withdrawal

Couples' global levels of demand-withdrawal, across the course of the entire interaction, were rated on single-item, 5-point Likert-type measure (1 = *very low*; 5 = *high*) described by Malik and Lindhal (2000). This measure is reported in Appendix D. Ratings were assigned by three independent raters, each of whom rated the entire set of interactions. Raters received approximately one hour of initial training, and consulted with the author throughout the project when they had questions about the rating procedures. Inter-rater reliability was assessed via a

two-way mixed ICC, using a consistency criterion for the average of the measure across all

coders. The ICC ($\rho = .75$) indicated excellent inter-rater reliability. On this basis, ratings were

averaged across coders to derive a mean demand-withdrawal score for each couple (overall $M =$

2.07, $SD = .80$).

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

I first computed frequencies for the various goal ratings. Across all interactions and intervals, the most frequent top-rated goal was the *task* goal (27%; $n = 289$), followed by *self-focused* and *relational* goals (both 26%; $n = 277$), and finally by the *partner-focused* goal (22%; $n = 234$). Next, global importance ratings for each goal were calculated by averaging individuals' goal priority ratings at each interval. Because couples differed in the length of interactions, goal importance estimates were based on the mean, rather than sum, of importance ratings for each goal. Goal importance ratings for were as follows: *self-focused goal* ($M = 2.62$, $SD =.81$), *partner-focused goal* ($M = 2.56$, $SD =.77$), *relational goal* ($M = 2.39$, $SD =.74$), and *task goal* ($M = 2.43$, $SD =.80$). Independent samples t-test indicated a sex difference on the priority of partner-focused goals, such that males ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.05$) reported greater overall importance of this goal across the course of interactions than did females ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(1061)=2.13$, $p < .05$. There were no other significant sex differences in goal importance ratings. Further, males ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.40$) reported greater degrees of conflict resolution than did females ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(1043)=2.13$, $p < .05$. No other sex differences were observed

Power Analyses

Post hoc power analysis was undertaken using the G*Power 3 statistical program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007). For the goal variability hypotheses (H1, H2), model-level power analysis was not possible due to the just-identified (i.e., 0 degrees of freedom) nature of the APIM path models tested. However, some guidance is possible based on guidelines

recommended by Bentler and Chou's (1987). Bentler and Chou proposed a 10:1 rule of thumb, according to which the ratio of observations to free parameters in a structural equation model should ideally exceed 10:1. Based on this rule of thumb, the linear APIM model tested in H1 exceeded the 10:1 ratio (i.e., 75 observations and 6 free parameters = 12.5:1 ratio). The curvilinear APIM model examined in H2 did not meet this standard (i.e., 75 observations and 15 parameters = 3:1 ratio). As the models tested in this study utilized path analyses with observed variables only, power was likely not impacted as severely in this case as for models involving latent variables (Kenny, 2012). Nevertheless, the ability to detect significant parameters in the curvilinear models (H2) may have been reduced due to the low observation-to- parameter ratio.

The associations between goal incongruity and conflict resolution (H3) and demand-withdrawal (H4) were examined using OLS regression. Assuming a criterion of $\alpha = .05$ (two-tailed), power to detect an effect equivalent to $R^2 = .15$ was equal to .91. Thus, power for these analyses was sufficient to detect all but the smallest effects.

The associations between individuals' goals at one interval and a partners' goals at the next interval were assessed using binary logistic regression via generalized linear mixed modeling. Assuming a criterion of $\alpha = .05$ (one-tailed) and a very conservative effective sample size of 150 (i.e., 75 couples x the smallest number of intervals per couple), power to detect an effect equivalent to *odds ratio* = 1.30 was .28. Using a somewhat less stringent estimate of five intervals per interaction (yielding an effective sample size of 375), power to detect an effect of *odds ratio* = 1.30 was .52. Thus, the analyses for H5 were considerably underpowered, which may help shed light on the numerous non-significant results for these analyses (described below).

For H6a, tests of the associations between individuals' goals at one time point and their verbal message focus in the same interval were assessed using multilevel modeling. Within this

framework, assuming a criterion of α = .05 (two-tailed) and an effective sample size of 75 (i.e.,

number of couples), power to detect an effect equivalent to R^2 = .15 was estimated to be equal to

.85. This level of power was acceptable, though not excellent. For the associations between

individuals' verbal message ratings and a partners' subsequent goals (H6b), assuming a criterion

of α = .05 (one-tailed), power to detect an effect equivalent to odds ratio = 1.30 was .18, a very

low level. Accordingly, the analyses for H6 were greatly qualified by the low power of these

tests.

Tests of Goal Variability Hypotheses (H1-H2)

H1 predicted a negative linear association between goal variability and conflict

resolution. Further, H2 posited a negative curvilinear (i.e., inverted-U shaped) association

between goal variability and conflict resolution. I estimated a separate model for each goal type.

As these models were tested in a hierarchical fashion, results are reported together.

In order to test H1 and H2, I utilized a series of APIM path models. To account for

collinearity due to the computation of the quadratic terms from their linear components in the

curvilinear model (H2), goal variability indices were mean-centered prior to all analyses (Aiken

& West, 1991). The initial model (H1) included the centered linear variability term for a given

goal type. On the second step, a quadratic variability term for that goal type was added to the

model, calculated by squaring the centered linear goal variability index. In order to account for

the possibility of both linear and curvilinear trends (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), both the linear and

quadratic goal variability term were included in the second model; however, although both terms

were included, only the significance of the squared term is relevant to the interpretation of a

curvilinear model (Aiken & West, 1991; Pedhazur, 1997).

On the first step, analyses indicated three significant linear trends, and several near-significant trends. Females' self goal variability ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .05$) had a significant negative linear associations with males' perceptions of resolution, though not with females' resolution; males' self goal variability was not a predictor of either partners' resolution perceptions. Males' partner goal variability had a negative linear association with males' own perceptions of conflict resolution ($\beta = -.31$, $p < .05$), though not with females'; females' partner goal variability was not associated with either partner's resolution. Additionally, females' task goal variability had a negative linear association with males' reports of conflict resolution ($\beta = -.38$, $p < .01$). Males' task goal variability was not associated with either partners' resolution. Relationship goal variability was not associated with resolution for either males or females. Although relationship goal variability did not predict resolution, results for females' self and task goal variability and males' partner goal variability were in line with H1. Altogether, these results provided some support for H1.

As I also hypothesized curvilinear associations between goal variability and conflict resolution (H2), I next investigated the significance of the quadratic models. Results indicated one significant curvilinear association. For the task goal model, females' task goal variability had a negative curvilinear (i.e., inverted U-shaped) association with males' perceptions of conflict resolution ($\beta = -.40$, $p < .05$). This association is summarized in Figure 1. However, while the curvilinear association was statistically significant, visual inspection of the plot indicated a generally linear negative trend. Males' perceptions of resolution increased slightly from very low to moderately low levels of female task goal variability, then began to decline around moderate levels of variability and decreased consistently from that point. Thus, results for females' task goal variability provided some support for H2, though this was qualified by the generally linear

trend. There were no other significant curvilinear associations between goal variability and conflict resolution for the self, partner, or relationship goal variability models, although a negative curvilinear association between females' self goal variability and males' resolution approached significance (β = -.45, $p < .10$). Overall, H2 received only modest support.

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Tests of Goal Incongruity Hypotheses (H3-H4)

</div>

H3 predicted that partner's goal incongruity would be negatively associated with conflict resolution, and H4 predicted that goal incongruity would be positively associated with incidence of demand-withdrawal patterns during conflict. Because goal incongruity is an inherently dyadic-level phenomenon, it constituted a between-dyads predictor. When partners' outcomes are substantially non-independent, outcomes of a between-dyads predictor should also be between-dyads outcomes (Kenny et al., 2006). Given the non-independence between males' and females' conflict resolution scores (r = .66, $p < .05$), dyadic conflict resolution scores were computed by averaging partners' resolution ratings within each dyad (M = 3.74, SD = 1.01). For H4, demand-withdrawal scores were assigned to dyads rather than individuals, so no transformations were necessary to make demand-withdrawal a between-dyads variable. Following Kenny et al.'s (2006) guidelines for models with between-dyads predictors and between-dyads outcomes, H3 and H4 were analyzed using OLS regression.

H3a: Pre-interaction Goal Incongruity and Conflict Resolution

H3a predicted a negative association between pre-interaction goal incongruity and conflict resolution. This prediction was tested with both the absolute and relative ratings of goal incongruity within couples' interactions. Because multiple goals were assumed to be co-occurring (Dillard, 2004), incongruity ratings for each goal type were also treated as co-occurring. As such, in order to guard against the possibility of suppression due to exclusion of
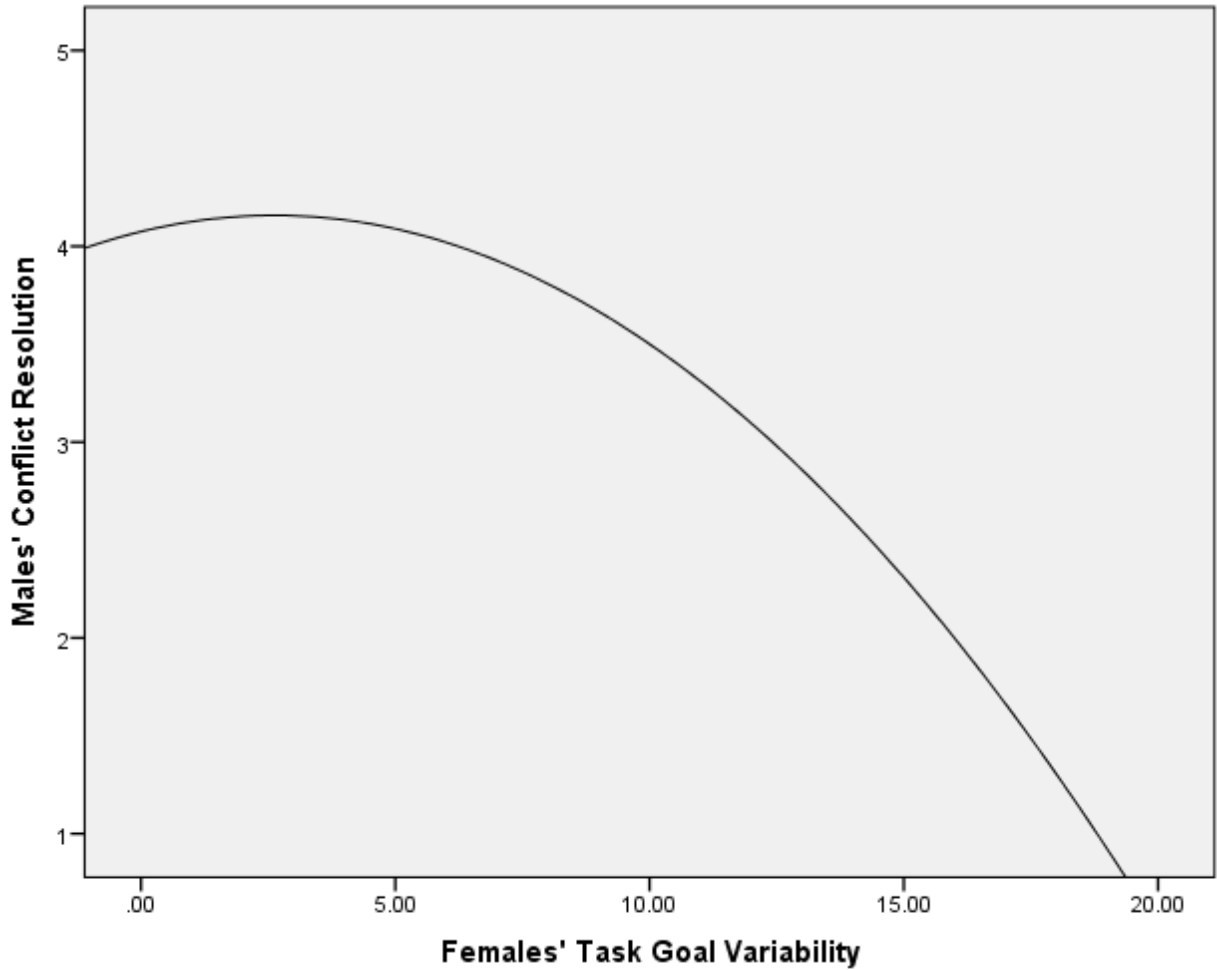
Fig. 1. Association between Females' Task Goal Variability and Males' Perception of Conflict Resolution.

relevant predictors (Conger, 1974), incongruity ratings for all four goal types were entered as a block in each model. Results for each model are reported below.

The omnibus model for conflict resolution as an outcome of *pre-interaction absolute goal incongruity* was not significant, $R = .26$, $R^2 = .07$, $F(4,70) = 1.32$, $p = .27$. Inspection of the individual parameters indicated a near-significant negative association between pre-interaction *task goal* incongruity and conflict resolution ($\beta = -.21$, $p = .07$). Pre-interaction absolute *self goal*

(β = -.03, p = .78), *partner goal* (β = .07, p = .55), and *relationship goal* (β = -.12, p = .33) incongruity were not associated with conflict resolution. Thus, results for the pre-interaction absolute goal incongruity model did not provide support for H3a, although the near-significant association between task goal incongruity and conflict resolution was in the predicted direction.

The omnibus model for conflict resolution as an outcome of *relative pre-interaction goal incongruity* approached significance, R = .35, R^2 = .12, $F(4,70)$ = 2.38, p = .06. Inspection of the individual parameters indicated a significant negative association between pre-interaction *partner goal* incongruity and conflict resolution (β = -.32, p = .01). Pre-interaction relative *self goal* (β = .13, p = .26), *relationship goal* (β = -.03, p = .79), and *task goal* (β = -.07, p = .55) incongruity were not associated with conflict resolution. Thus, results for pre-interaction relative partner goal incongruity were consistent with H3a, though H3a was not supported for self, relationship, or task goal incongruity.

H3b: Within-Interaction Goal Incongruity and Conflict Resolution

H3b predicted a negative association between goal incongruity during interactions and conflict resolution. This was tested with both the absolute and relative ratings of goal incongruity within couples' interactions. As above, incongruity scores for all four goal types were entered in a block in each model. Results for each model are reported below.

The omnibus model for conflict resolution as an outcome of *within-interaction absolute goal incongruity* was significant, R = .49, R^2 = .24, $F(4,70)$ = 5.61, p < .01. Inspection of the individual parameters indicated a significant positive association between within-interaction *relationship goal* incongruity and conflict resolution (β = .33, p < .01), and a near-significant positive association between within-interaction *partner goal* incongruity and conflict resolution (β = .20, p = .09). Within-interaction absolute *self goal* (β = .13, p = .26) and *task goal* (β = .03,

$p = .81$) incongruity were not associated with conflict resolution. Although within-interaction absolute relationship goal incongruity was associated with resolution, this association was positive, opposite the predicted direction. Thus, H3b was not supported for any of the goal types.

The omnibus model for conflict resolution as an outcome of *relative within-interaction goal incongruity* was non-significant, $R = .09$, $R^2 = .01$, $F(4,70) = .14$, $p = .97$. There were no significant associations between self goal incongruity ($\beta = .01$, $p = .96$), partner goal incongruity ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .80$), relationship goal incongruity ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .88$), or task goal incongruity ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .59$), and conflict resolution. Thus, H3b was not supported for relative within-interaction goal incongruity. In sum, across both models H3b did not receive support.

H4a: Pre-interaction Goal Incongruity and Demand-Withdrawal

The omnibus model for demand-withdrawal as an outcome of *pre-interaction absolute goal incongruity* was not significant, $R = .14$, $R^2 = .02$, $F(4,69) = .33$, $p = .86$. Pre-interaction absolute *self goal* ($\beta = -.02$, $p = .87$), *partner goal* ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .69$), *relationship goal* ($\beta = .14$, $p = .28$), and task goal ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .78$) incongruity were not associated with demand-withdrawal. Thus, results for the pre-interaction absolute goal incongruity model did not provide support for H4a.

The omnibus model for demand-withdrawal as an outcome of *relative pre-interaction goal incongruity* was likewise non-significant, $R = .20$, $R^2 = .04$, $F(4,69) = .73$, $p = .57$. Pre-interaction relative *self goal* ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .55$), *partner goal* ($\beta = .10$, $p = .40$), *relationship goal* ($\beta = .17$, $p = .16$), and *task goal* ($\beta = -.08$, $p = .93$) incongruity were not associated with conflict resolution. Thus, H4a was not supported.

H4b: Within-interaction Goal Incongruity and Demand-Withdrawal

The omnibus model for demand-withdrawal as an outcome of *within-interaction absolute goal incongruity* approached significance, $R = .35$, $R^2 = .12$, $F(4,69) = 2.34$, $p = .06$. Inspection of the individual parameters indicated a significant negative association between within-interaction *relationship goal* incongruity ($\beta = -.27$, $p = .03$) and demand-withdrawal, opposite the hypothesized direction. Within-interaction absolute *self goal* ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .95$), *partner goal* ($\beta = -.07$, $p = .58$), and *task goal* ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .38$) incongruity were not associated with demand-withdrawal. Thus, results for within-interaction absolute goal incongruity did not support H4b.

The omnibus model for demand-withdrawal as an outcome of *within-interaction relative goal incongruity* was non-significant, $R = .09$, $R^2 = .01$, $F(4,70) = .14$, $p = .97$. Within-interaction relative *self goal* ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .93$), *partner goal* ($\beta = .02$, $p = .87$), *relationship goal* ($\beta = -.03$, $p = .84$), and *task goal* ($\beta = .07$, $p = .58$) incongruity were not associated with demand-withdrawal. Thus, results for within-interaction relative goal incongruity did not support H4b.

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Tests of Sequential Hypotheses (H5-H6)

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Hypothesis 5: 1-Lag Partner Goal Effects

Hypothesis 5 predicted that individuals' ratings of goal importance at one time interval would be associated with partners' ratings of the same goal at the subsequent time interval. This prediction was evaluated using generalized linear mixed modeling (via the GENLINMIXED package) in SPSS, with analyses based on one-minute intervals. Prior to analyses, participants' ordinal goal ratings were re-coded categorically, based on the highest-rated goal for each interval. Ratings for each goal type were dummy coded (1 = *highest-rated*; 0 = *not highest-rated*) at both 1-lag and 0-lag time points. Although links between individuals' and partners'

categorically-coded goals could have been estimated using sequential analysis techniques (Bakeman & Quera, 2011), because H5 was considered a component of a larger mediation hypothesis (H6), it was tested using generalized linear mixed modeling due to this procedure's ability to incorporate both categorical (i.e., goals) and continuous (i.e., verbal rating) variables as predictors of a categorical outcome (i.e., partners' later goals). Generalized linear mixed modeling is capable of accommodating both continuous and categorical predictors of a binary outcome using logistic regression, as well as accounting for non-independence between partners' responses within the same dyad. Thus, associations between individuals' goals and partners' goals in the following minute were analyzed using this approach.

For each outcome, 1-lag associations were tested using a generalized linear mixed model, using a binary logistic link function and with dyadic intercepts modeled as random effects. For both males and females, individuals' and partners' 1-lag self, partner, and relationship goals were entered as binary predictors of individuals' 0-lag goals (individuals' own goals were included in order to account for autoregressive effects). Results are summarized in Table 1 (*self goals*), Table 2 (*partner goals*), Table 3 (*relationship goals*) and Table 4 (*task goals*). Only two partner effects were significant in these analyses. Females' 1-lag partner and relationship goals in one minute were associated with increased likelihood of males' self goals in the next minute. No other associations between individuals' goals and partners' subsequent goals were significant. Thus, H5 received little support.

Table 1

Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Self-focused Goal Ratings in

Subsequent Interval

Predictor	Male 0-lag Self Goal Model				Female 0-lag Self Goal Model		
	B	$SE\ B$	e^B		B	$SE\ B$	e^B
Level-1 Fixed Effects							
Intercept	-.14	.91	.87		1.09	85	2.97
Male (1-lag)							
Self-focused Goal	.12	.31	1.12		.29	.32	1.33
Partner-focused Goal	-.25	.40	.78		.40	.35	1.49
Relationship Goal	-.14	.34	.87		-.01	.32	.99
Female (1-lag)							
Self-focused Goal	.30	.35	1.34		.16	.30	1.17
Partner-focused Goal	.79*	.34	2.20		-.22	.32	.80
Relationship Goal	.81*	.34	2.26		-.51	.34	.60
AIC	1958.24				1977.35		
BIC	1962.28				1981.39		
Level-2 Random Parameters							
Intercept/intercept (σ^2)	.69* (.32)				.09 (.17)		

Note: e^B = exponentiated *B* (odds ratio). Goal ratings coded as 1 for *top-rated* and 0 for *other*.

Coefficients represent the predicted increase in likelihood of category membership when the

predictor's value changes from 0 to 1. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 2

Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Partner-focused Goal

Ratings in Subsequent Interval

Predictor	Male 0-lag Partner Goal Model			Female 0-lag Partner Goal Model		
	B	$SE\ B$	e^B	B	$SE\ B$	e^B
	Level-1 Fixed Effects					
Intercept	.68	1.07	1.97	.90	.95	2.46
Male (1-lag)						
Self-focused Goal	.14	.42	1.15	.21	.34	1.23
Partner-focused Goal	1.49*	.40	4.46	-.02	.41	.98
Relationship Goal	.02	.42	1.02	-.32	.37	.73
Female (1-lag)						
Self-focused Goal	.26	.36	1.30	.22	.36	1.25
Partner-focused Goal	-.60	.43	.55	.51	.34	1.66
Relationship Goal	.00	.39	1.00	-.12	.39	.89
AIC	2131.86			2011.13		
BIC	2135.90			2015.18		
	Level-2 Random Parameters					
Intercept/intercept (σ^2)	.25 (.30)			1.01* (.42)		

Note: e^B = exponentiated B (odds ratio). Goal ratings coded as 1 for *top-rated* and 0 for *other*.

Coefficients represent the predicted increase in likelihood of category membership when the

predictor's value increases from 0 to 1. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3

Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Partner-focused Goal

Ratings in Subsequent Interval

Predictor	Male 0-lag Partner Goal Model			Female 0-lag Partner Goal Model		
	B	$SE\ B$	e^B	B	$SE\ B$	e^B
	Level-1 Fixed Effects					
Intercept	1.26	.91	3.53	.55	.96	1.73
Male (1-lag)						
Self-focused Goal	.39	.34	1.48	.03	.35	1.03
Partner-focused Goal	-.25	.43	.78	-.09	.42	.91
Relationship Goal	.78*	.32	2.18	.38	.34	1.46
Female (1-lag)						
Self-focused Goal	-.30	.32	.97	-.02	.36	.98
Partner-focused Goal	-.52	.34	.59	-.29	.38	.75
Relationship Goal	-.55	.34	.58	1.04*	.33	2.83
AIC	1986.55			2015.45		
BIC	1990.59			2019.49		
	Level-2 Random Parameters					
Intercept/intercept (σ^2)	.67* (.31)			.37 (.29)		

Note: e^B = exponentiated B (odds ratio). Goal ratings coded as 1 for *top-rated* and 0 for *other*.

Coefficients represent the predicted increase in likelihood of category membership when the

predictor's value increases from 0 to 1. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 4

Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Task-focused Goal Ratings in

Subsequent Interval

Predictor	Male 0-lag Task Goal Model				Female 0-lag Task Goal Model		
	B	*SE B*	e^B		*B*	*SE B*	e^B
				Fixed Effects			
Intercept	-.51	.30	.60		-.69*	.29	.50
Male (1-lag)							
Self-focused Goal	-.38	.32	.69		-.39	.33	.68
Partner-focused Goal	-.58	.39	.56		-.23	.37	.80
Relationship Goal	-.61	.32	.54		.10	.31	1.11
Female (1-lag)							
Self-focused Goal	-.47	.34	0.17		-.05	.30	.95
Partner-focused Goal	-.06	.33	0.85		-.31	.32	.74
Relationship Goal	-.25	.34	0.47		-.45	.33	.64
AIC	1966.79				1953.57		
BIC	1970.83				1957.62		
				Random Parameters			
Intercept/intercept (σ^2)	.78* (.35)				.56 (.29)		

Note: e^B = exponentiated *B* (odds ratio). Goal ratings coded as 1 for *top-rated* and 0 for *other*.

Coefficients represent the predicted increase in likelihood of category membership when the

predictor's value increases from 0 to 1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Hypothesis 6a: Individuals' Goals Predicting Individuals' Concurrent Verbal Focus

Hypothesis 6a proposed that individuals' goals would be reflected in their message focus during the same time interval. This prediction was examined by estimating a series of generalized linear mixed models in which individuals' 1-lag goals predicted their own 1-lag verbal focus rating. Ratings for each goal type were dummy coded (1 = *highest-rated*; 0 = *not highest-rated*) at both 1-lag and 0-lag time points. Using a linear link function, individuals' own 1-lag *self-focused*, *partner-focused*, and *relationship* goals were entered as predictors, and individuals' 1-lag verbal focus ratings were entered as outcomes.

Task goals were omitted as predictors in these analyses, on both theoretical and statistical grounds. First, because all participants were assigned the *task* of attempting to resolve the serial argument, we considered the task goal as framing the pursuit of all other goals (e.g., Dillard et al., 1989). Second, due to the ordinal nature of the goal ratings, goal ratings for each participant at each time point were non-independent. For instance, if a participant rated the *self-focused* goal as the most important goal at a given time point, ratings for all other goals were necessarily lower for that time point. As such, including ratings for all four goal types in the model simultaneously yielded a model with zero degrees of freedom, and precluded estimation of the significance of the parameters. Omitting task goal ratings provided an additional degree of freedom from each participants' ratings and allowed for significance to be estimated. For all models, goal ratings were modeled as fixed effects and dyad-level intercepts were modeled as random effects (i.e., couple effects).

H6a: Self-Interest Verbal Model. Males' self (B = -.002, p = .98, .95 CI = [-.21, .21]), partner (B = -.09, p = .49, .95 CI = [-.34, .16]), and relationship goals (B = -.09, p = .43, .95 CI = [-.31, .13]) were not associated with males' self-interest verbal ratings during the same minute

(AIC = 994.99; BIC = 1002.95), although there was a significant couple effect (B = .55, Wald Z = 4.77, p < .001, .95 C.I. = [.36, .83]). Likewise, females' self (B = .13, p = .20, .95 CI = [-.07, .33]), partner (B = -.09, p = .41, .95 CI = [-.30, .12]) and relationship goals (B = -.01, p = .95, .95 CI = [-.21, .19]) were not associated with females' self-interest verbal ratings during the same minute (AIC = 1053.78; BIC = 1061.84), though there was a significant couple effect for females' self-interest verbal ratings (B = .69, Wald Z = 5.34, p < .001, .95 C.I. = [.47, .99]). H6a was not supported for the self-interest verbal models.

H6a: Partner-Interest Verbal Model. Males' self goals were not associated with males' partner-interest verbal ratings during the same minute (B = .14, p = .15, .95 CI = [-.05, .33]). However, males' partner (B = .29, p < .01, .95 CI = [.07, .51]), and relationship goals (B = .23, p < .05, .95 CI = [.04, .43]) were positively associated with males' partner-interest verbal ratings during the same minute (AIC = 865.58; BIC = 873.54). Additionally, there was a significant couple effect (B = .11, Wald Z = 3.43, p = .001, .95 C.I. = [.06, .20]). Females' self (B = -.08, p = .31, .95 CI = [-.24, .08]), partner goals (B = -.03, p = .71, .95 CI = [-.20, .14]), and relationship goals (B = -.01, p = .08, .95 CI = [-.17, .15]) were not associated with females' self-interest verbal ratings during the same minute (AIC = 818.76; BIC = 826.83). There was a significant couple effect for females' partner-interest verbal ratings (B = .17, Wald Z = 4.35, p < .001, .95 C.I. = [.11, .26]). Thus, H6a received support in the partner-interest verbal model for males, though not females.

H6a: Relationship-Focused Verbal Model. Males' self (B = .01, p = .89, .95 CI = [-.11, .13]), partner (B = .04, p = .62, .95 CI = [-.11, .18]), and relationship goals (B = .05, p = .46, .95 CI = [-.08, .17]) did not predict males' relationship-focused-verbal ratings during the same minute (AIC = 524.11; BIC = 532.07). However, there was a significant couple effect for males'

relationship-focused verbal ratings ($B = .14$, Wald $Z = 4.89$, $p < .001$, .95 C.I. = [.10, .22]).

Additionally, females' self ($B = -.05$, $p = .40$, .95 CI = [-.16, .06]) and relationship goals ($B = -.05$, $p = .39$, .95 CI = [-.16, .06]) were not associated with females' relationship-focused verbal ratings during the same minute. However, females' partner goals were negatively associated with their simultaneous relationship-focused verbal ratings ($B = -.13$, $p < .05$, .95 CI = [-.24, -.01]) ($AIC = 534.03$; $BIC = 542.09$). Furthermore, there was a significant couple effect for females' relationship-focused verbal ratings ($B = .13$, Wald $Z = 5.14$, $p < .001$, .95 C.I. = [.09, .19]). Thus, H6a received modest support in the relationship-focused verbal models for females, though not males.

  H6a: Task-Focused Verbal Model. Males' self ($B = -.13$, $p = .20$, .95 CI = [-.33, .07]), partner ($B = .13$, $p = .29$, .95 CI = [-.11, .36]), and relationship goals ($B = -.13$, $p = .22$, .95 CI = [-.33, .08]) did not predict males' relationship-focused-verbal ratings during the same minute ($AIC = 919.62$; $BIC = 927.58$), although there was a significant couple effect ($B = .36$, Wald $Z = 4.71$, $p < .001$, .95 C.I. = [.24, .55]). Females' partner ($B = -.03$, $p = .79$, .95 CI = [-.22, .17]) and relationship goals ($B = .09$, $p = .32$, .95 CI = [-.09, .28]) were not associated with females' task-focused verbal ratings during the same minute; however, females' self goals were positively associated with their simultaneous task-focused verbal ratings ($B = .18$, $p < .05$, .95 CI = [.003, .36]) ($AIC = 960.60$; $BIC = 968.66$). Additionally, there was a significant couple effect for females' task-focused verbal ratings ($B = .37$, Wald $Z = 4.93$, $p < .001$, .95 C.I. = [.25, .55]). Therefore, H6a received modest support in the task-focused verbal model for females, though not for males.

Hypothesis 6b: Verbal Messages Mediating Goal-Goal Linkages

Hypothesis 6b predicted that individuals' verbal messages at one minute would mediate the influence of individuals' goals at the same minute on a partner's goals at the following minute. Within the framework described by Baron & Kenny (1986), mediation is discerned via the following steps: the observation of a significant association between the predictor and outcome (Step 1), between the predictor and mediator (Step 2), and between the mediator and outcome (Step 3). Finally, on Step 4, the addition of the mediator to the Step 1 equation should lead to the association between the predictor and outcome becoming smaller or non-significant (Baron & Kenny).

Step 1 associations were evaluated in the tests for H5 (reported above). These analyses uncovered two significant Step 1 paths: females' 1-lag partner and relationship goals in one minute were associated with increased likelihood of males' self goals in the next minute. No other Step 1 associations were significant. Thus, on Step 2, associations between females' 1-lag partner and relationship goals and females' 1-lag verbal focus ratings were examined via a series of generalized linear mixed models, using a linear link function to model the relationship between each goal type and each verbal focus rating. Females' 1-lag partner goals were not associated with females' 1-lag self-interest ($B = -.13$, $p = .15$, .95 CI = [-.31, .05]), partner-interest ($B = -.001$, $p = .11$, .95 CI = [-.14, .14]), or task-focused verbal ratings ($B = -.12$, $p = .16$, .95 CI = [-.28, .05]), although a negative association between females' 1-lag partner goals and 1-lag relationship-focused verbal ratings approached significance ($B = -.09$, $p = .06$, .95 CI = [-.19, .01]). Further, females' 1-lag relationship goals were not associated with their own 1-lag self-interest ($B = -.03$, $p = .75$, .95 CI = [-.20, .14]), partner-interest ($B = .03$, $p = .71$, .95 CI = [-.11, .16]), relationship-focused ($B = .00$, $p = .95$, .95 CI = [-.09, .10]), or task-focused verbal ratings

(B = .04, p = .61, .95 CI = [-.12, .20]). Thus, none of the associations between the predictor and

mediator (Step 2) met the criteria for mediation. Accordingly, H6b was not supported.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Much communication scholarship has been rooted in the assumption that communicators pursue multiple goals, and that the salience of these goals varies between and across interactions (Berger, 1995; Caughlin, 2010; Clark & Delia, 1979; Dillard, 2004; Wilson, 2002). A few studies have measured momentary changes in goal priority, and the impact that such goals (once prioritized) may have on moment-by-moment communication behaviors (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013; Waldron, 1997). However, to date, no known prior research has investigated the influence of the *degree* of goal variability on global interaction outcomes. Further, little research has examined the role that (in)congruity between partners' goals at a given point in time, and throughout an interaction, may play in shaping communication behaviors. This study broke new ground by directly assessing the associations between goal variability and global features of interactive episodes. Results illuminated that *goal variability as such* (regardless of the overall *importance* of a given goal) may have implications for communicative outcomes within the context of relational conflict negotiations. Further, some evidence was observed for the propositions that incongruity between partners' goals may influence communication behaviors and outcomes, and that an individual's goals and verbal messages at one time point may influence a partner's goals at a later time point. I now turn to highlight specific features of these results.

Goal Variability and Conflict Negotiation

Goal Variability is Associated with Global Interaction Outcomes

The current results provide the first empirical documentation that the degree to which individuals' goals vary during a single interaction may have implications for communicative

outcomes of that episode. Variability in the salience of females' self- and task-focused goals, along with variability in males' partner-focused goals, was negatively associated with males' perceptions of conflict resolution (H1). Furthermore, there was a significant (though modest) negative curvilinear association of females' task-focused goal variability with males' perceptions of resolution (H2). On the whole, however, results generally indicated a negative linear association between goal variability and conflict resolution, as predicted in H1.

Many prior studies have assessed global goals for communicative episodes (e.g., Dillard et al., 1989; Ohbuchi & Tedeschi, 1997; Sabee & Wilson, 2005; Samp, 2006; Samp & Solomon, 1999). Extending this focus on global interaction-level goals, Caughlin (2010) has argued that overarching "goal tendencies" may persist across multiple interactions and contribute to global features of relationships. While acknowledging the validity of these perspectives, the current study highlights the importance of examining variations in goals *within* specific interactions, as a micro-level goal focus may uncover insights that are obscured when investigating goals at a more macro-level (i.e., global and/or multi-interaction goals). Results of this study provide evidence that the presence of micro-level goal fluctuations during interactions - whether in the form of within-person goal variability, between-persons goal incongruity, or influences of goals at one time on goals at a later time point - are an important aspect of conflict negotiation.

Goal Variability May Complicate Conflict Negotiation

The negative linear associations between goal variability and conflict resolution provide support for the theoretical claim forwarded in the introduction to this study, namely, that goal variability may lie at the root of some communication difficulties. Communication scholars have emphasized that goals are linked with the formation of specific message plans (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 2004). As such, high degrees of goal variability may complicate online planning, as

individuals are presented with the need to formulate more numerous and/or more complex plans in light of their multiple, shifting goals. Successful conflict resolution requires finding a way to integrate partners' competing goals (Canary, 2003), and the ability to infer and respond to a partners' goals during conflict has been associated with more successful conflict negotiation (Bates & Samp, 2011; Lakey & Canary, 2002). Accordingly, shifting goals during interaction may make it difficult for partners to accurately perceive and adapt to the rapidly changing interaction dynamics that characterize dyadic communication.

The challenge of navigating goal variability during communicative interactions may be particularly salient within the context of serial argumentation. This study examined serial arguments because they represent a recurring, problematic, and goal-directed relational phenomenon. Although past research has explored the ways in which the importance of particular goals contributes to serial argument processes (e.g., Bevan et al., 2008; Caughlin & Scott, 2010; Hample, Richards, & Na, 2012), this study represents the first study to date to investigate the ways in which the degree of *variability* between multiple goals during the course of an argumentative episode may shape the outcomes of that episode. Specifically, I argued that relational partners' inability or unwillingness to remain focused on initial goals during conflict may be one reason partners struggle to resolve serial arguments (thus perpetuating their serial nature). The negative associations observed between goal variability and conflict resolution provide evidence for this claim, though in the future longitudinal research is needed to establish whether variability in one argumentative episode is associated with features of subsequent episodes.

In particular, results of this study suggest that variability between task- and non-task focused goals may represent an especially challenging form of goal variability. This possibility

has been implied (though not explicated in detail) in previous scholars' arguments that secondary goals (often identity- or relationship-focused) that become prominent during the course of interactions may "derail" the pursuit of task/instrumental goals (Berger, 1995; Hample & Dallinger, 1995). In the current study, the association between females' task goal variability (i.e., degree of fluctuation between focus on task goals and focus on identity- or relationship-focused goals) and males' conflict resolution was stronger than for any other form of goal variability. This result highlights prominently that the complications arising from shifts between task-focused and non-task focused goals may be particularly detrimental to the resolution of serial arguments.

The goal variability results observed in this study have important implications for understanding serial argumentation from a multiple goals perspective. For instance, Caughlin and Scott's (2010) perspective examines how particular constellations of goals may lead to unique forms of conflict tactics during argumentative episodes. Yet the current work illustrates that conflict processes may be influenced not only by the presence or prioritization of multiple goals, but also by the *degree* (i.e. overall level of variability) and *manner* in which these multiple goals shift in salience over the course of an episode (e.g., task- versus non-task related goal variability). It would also be interesting to explore the extent to which goal variability may be associated with other problematic features of serial argumentation, such as affective and physiological arousal (Malis & Roloff, 2006), rumination (Johnson & Roloff, 1998), and imagined conflict interactions (Hample, Richards, & Na, 2012). In any case, the results of this study highlight that attempts to resolve serial arguments are likely to be impeded to the extent that partners are unable or unwilling to maintain a consistent focus on their goals, particularly task-related goals.

Sex Differences in the Associations between Goal Variability and Resolution

Interestingly, the associations between goal variability and perceived conflict resolution were significant for males', but not females', resolution perceptions. That is, while there were significant association between both males' (partner) and females' (self and task) goal variability and males' resolution, neither males' nor females' goal variability predicted females' perceptions of resolution. Admittedly, given the underpowered nature of the analyses, it is possible that influences of goal variability on females' resolution perceptions would have appeared with a larger sample. Nevertheless, even if this were the case, the observation of associations between goal variability and males' resolution perceptions suggests that these associations would likely be more robust than those for females' perceptions, even in a larger sample. What sense can we make of males' apparent greater sensitivity to both own and partners' goal variability in the current data?

One potential explanation is suggested by the difference in males' and females' concern with partner-focused goals in this study. Although the average salience of self-, relationship- and task-focused goals did not differ for males and females, males rated partner-focused goals significantly higher, on average, than did females. It is possible that males demonstrated more susceptibility to goal variability precisely because they were more concerned about a partner's goals than were females. As noted previously, sensitivity to a partner's goals is associated with more effective conflict negotiation (Bates & Samp, 2011; Lakey & Canary, 2002). However, the ability to accurately infer and adapt to a partner's concerns is likely to be especially salient for individuals who are highly focused on pursuing partner-oriented goals. As such, fluctuations in a partner's goals may make the process of inferring and adapting to that partner's concerns more

difficult: in such situations, partner-focused communicators are essentially attempting to hit a moving target.

This line of reasoning may help to explain the observation that females' self and task goal variability were negatively associated with males' perceptions of resolution, while males' variability was unrelated to females' resolution. Additionally, it is possible that the negative association between males' partner goal variability and their own perceptions of resolution may have been rooted in males' partner-focused goal pursuits being frustrated. To the extent that males desired to pursue partner-focused goals but found it necessary to shift away from these goals in response to their female partners' shifting goals, males may have had a harder time achieving their desired (i.e., partner-focused) outcomes. Admittedly, this explanation for the gendered patterns of responsiveness to goal variability is plausible, but remains speculative in the absence of data on males' (and females') perceptions of their *partners'* goals (discussed later).

Potential Mediators/Moderators of Goal Variability-Communication Links

The explanation offered above for the links between goal variability and poorer conflict outcomes is rooted in aspects of planning theory (Berger, 1997), as well as Dillard's (2004) *goals-plans-actions* model. However, other theoretical explanations are also possible. I offer the following discussion in order to elucidate additional frameworks that may help shed light on the negative associations between goal variability and conflict resolution. These additional frameworks should be understood as complementary, rather than competing, perspectives on the dynamics observed in this study.

A potentially fruitful perspective for elucidating the role of goal variability in conflict is rooted in theories of uncertainty. One possible source of goal variability is uncertainty about one's goals for an interaction. Emphatically, goal variability should not be simply identified with

goal uncertainty - there are myriad reasons other than uncertainty that individuals might vary in their goals during an interaction. Nevertheless, to the extent that individuals *are* uncertain about the extent to which they desire to pursue particular goals, they may "waffle" back and forth between attempting to remain focused on a given goal and, alternately, prioritizing other goals during the course of the interaction. Likewise, Berger (1997) has argued that uncertainty about a partner's goals is associated with more tentative communication. Additionally, research has demonstrated that uncertainty about the state of one's relationship or relational goals and desires is associated with decreased communicative effectiveness in such domains as verbal fluency, affiliation, and perceived effectiveness (Knobloch, 2006). While the present study did not assess relational uncertainty per se, it is possible that an analogous process of goal uncertainty may be contributing to the difficulties in conflict resolution perceived at higher levels of goal variability. That is, if ambiguities in the interaction or conflicted desires contribute to uncertainty about one's own goals, the processes of formulating messages (Berger, 1997), interpreting a partner's messages (Knobloch, Miller, Bond, & Mannone, 2007), and responding to partners (Knobloch, Knobloch-Fedders, & Durbin, 2011) may be negatively impacted. Admittedly, these suggestions are speculative, as it is not clear to what degree relational uncertainty coheres with goal uncertainty, nor whether goal uncertainty is itself an important predictor of communicative outcomes. Future research would benefit from examining possible links between goal variability and goal uncertainty, by explicitly investigating goal uncertainty as a possible contributor to goal variability (or vice versa), as well as the degree to which these constructs may mediate or moderate one another's effects on communicative outcomes.

Beyond state-based goal uncertainties, it is possible that dispositional factors, such as attachment styles (Bartholomew, 1990), may play a role in the links between goal variability and

communicative outcomes. Research indicates that attachment anxiety is associated with greater instance of negative conflict behaviors, such as verbal aggression, demand-withdrawal, and avoidance, while secure attachment is associated with engaging in constructive conflict behaviors such as collaborating (Domingue & Mollen, 2009; La Valley & Guerrero, 2012). Anxious attachment is also associated with increased physiological stress (in the form of cortisol reactivity) as a result of relational conflict, compared with secure attachment (Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). While the current study did not collect data on participants' attachment styles, it seems possible that attachment styles may also influence goal variability during conflict. Locke (2008) observed that anxious attachment was associated with greater variability in individuals' interpersonal goals (as calculated across, rather than within, interactions), as well as with more conflicting goals, than either secure or avoidant attachment. That anxious attachment is associated with both greater variability in interpersonal goals (Locke), and with poorer conflict processes and outcomes (Domingue & Mollen; Powers et al.), suggests that at least some of the results observed in the current study may have been related to participants' attachment orientations. For instance, might goal variability mediate the previously observed associations between anxious attachment and sub-optimal conflict negotiation (e.g., La Valley & Guerrero)? I suggest this as a fruitful line of future inquiry, with the potential for tying together various lines of research on attachment, goals, and message production.

Goal Incongruity and Conflict Negotiation

In addition to goal variability, I predicted that goal incongruity (i.e., partners' disagreement about the importance of specific goals at a given time) would be associated with less effective conflict negotiation. Based on the view that conflict is rooted in partners' pursuit of incompatible goals (e.g., Canary, 2003), greater degrees of goal incongruity were hypothesized

to be associated with less effective conflict negotiation. Specifically, goal incongruity was predicted to be positively associated with conflict resolution (H3) and heightened incidence of demand-withdrawal conflict patterns (H4). These predictions received limited support. As a predictor of conflict resolution, only (pre-interaction relative) *partner goal incongruity* was negatively associated with resolution (H3a); *self* and *task goal incongruity* were not associated with resolution. Additionally, (within-interaction absolute) *relationship goal incongruity* was associated with resolution (H3b), but this association was positive, rather than negative. Finally, (within-interaction absolute) *relationship goal incongruity* was negatively associated with the incidence of demand-withdrawal, opposite the predicted direction (H4b). No other forms of goal incongruity were associated with demand-withdrawal.

Nevertheless, the results of this initial study provided preliminary support for the proposition that goal incongruity may influence conflict processes and outcomes. At the same time, the failure to observe strong goal incongruity effects may also point toward the need for an expanded conceptualization and/or operationalization of goal incongruity. The present study treated goal incongruity as any instance of partners' differing in their prioritization of goals at a given time point (or the average degree of differences in prioritization across the interaction). However, in retrospect it seems likely that all goal incongruity is not created equal.

Palomares (2011) distinguished three possibilities for combinations of partners' goals. First, partners' goals may be *identical*; that is, both partners are pursuing exactly the same goal (e.g., both partners seeking to resolve the issue). Identical goals were treated as congruent in the present study. Second, partners may pursue *concordant* goals. Concordant goals are different, yet complementary, such that each partner's (different) goal helps further the achievement of the other's (e.g., one partner seeking to assign blame and the other seeking to accept blame). Third,

partners may pursue goals that are *discordant*. Discordant goals are those that are mutually exclusive or antagonistic (e.g., one partner seeking to address the issue and the other partner seeking to avoid the issue).

In the current study, all non-identical goals were operationalized as "incongruent." However, Palomares' (2011) distinction between *concordant* and *discordant* goals suggests that it may not be primarily the presence of goal incongruity, but the type of incongruity (i.e., concordant vs. discordant), that shapes interaction dynamics. For example, recent work (Palomares, 2011; 2012) suggests that when communicators' goals differ, discordant goals may be more readily inferable by communicators than concordant goals, as the mutually antagonistic nature of discordant goals is likely to be more evident than the complimentary (and thus easier-to-overlook) character of concordant goal differences. Indeed, these dynamics are heightened when communicators are under high cognitive load (Palomares, 2011), as is likely during conflict interactions. The methods used in this study for operationalizing goal incongruity were not able to distinguish between discordant and concordant goals. Future investigations of the role of goal incongruity in conflict should take account of the concordant versus disconcordant nature of partners' goals in order to more fully assess the perspective advanced in this project.

Taken together, results of this study paint a complex portrait of the role of goal incongruity in relational conflict. On one hand, partner goal incongruity was associated with less successful conflict negotiation, as indexed by its negative association with conflict resolution. On the other hand, relationship goal incongruity was linked to more positive conflict negotiation, as reflected in its positive association with conflict resolution and negative association with demand-withdrawal patterns. This is interesting in light of the fact that partner- and relationship-focused goals are frequently observed as somewhat similar in their effects on communication

during conflict (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013). While partner and relationship goals may have similar communicative implications in some cases, these goals exist on different levels of abstraction (see Dillard, 1997). I now turn to explicate this distinction in greater detail.

Individually-Focused Versus Dyadically-Focused Goals

Although self, partner, relationship and task goals are frequently treated as differing only in their content, what is rarely recognized is that these goals also differ in their levels of abstraction. Specifically, self- and partner-focused goals exist on an individual plane, whereas relationship- and task-focused goals exist on a fundamentally dyadic level. While oriented toward different entities (oneself vs. a partner), both self- and partner-focused goals are oriented toward the pursuit of individual-level aims. Arguably, one does not need a partner's cooperation to *pursue* self-focused goals, though one may need a partner's cooperation in order to *achieve* some self-focused goals. For instance, the goal of presenting oneself as "in the right" during a conflict does not rest on the partner's willingness to support such a goal, although its successful achievement (i.e., acknowledgment by a partner that one is "in the right") would depend on the partner's agreement. Similarly, pursuing a partner-focused goal, in itself, does not require that the partner necessarily be open to receiving such support; indeed, literature on social support suggests that attempts to support a partner are sometimes rejected (Braithwaite & Eckstein, 2003; Reynolds & Perrin, 2004).

Although the ultimate achievement of some individually-focused goals may depend on a partner's collaboration (e.g., "Getting my partner to stop blaming herself"), in many cases individuals may be able to achieve such goals on their own. For instance, self-focused goals such as expressing one's viewpoint (e.g., "I've got to get this off my chest") do not depend on a partner's response, since the entire aim is simply to "have one's say." Additionally, many

partner-focused goals, such as expressing unconditional love (e.g., "Regardless of whether you accept it or not, I'll always love you"), do not require that a partner acknowledge or agree with one's expression; merely to pursue the goal is to attain it. Thus, many self- and partner-focused goals may be successfully achieved (or at least pursued) purely on the basis of one's decision to do so. To the extent that individuals view conflicts as rooted in the competing perspectives of the two *individuals* (Canary, 2003), they may consider such conflicts resolved if they are able to successfully pursue their individually-focused goals.

While self- and partner-focused goals target the perspectives of the *individuals* in the relationship, relational and task goals represent higher-order *dyadic* processes. As such, they are more closely tied to the ability of both partners to coordinate their behaviors. The successful achievement of a relational goal (e.g., "Maintain harmony between us") or task goal (e.g., "Come to an agreement about how to fix the problem") is much more intricately linked to a partner's willingness to pursue the same goal. To be sure, one may attempt to pursue such goals by oneself, but if a partner is not also committed to pursuing the relational or task goal, it is unlikely that resolution will be achieved. It is probable that the achievement of relational and task goals is dependent on a partners' simultaneous pursuit of the same goal, whereas this is not necessarily a requirement for self- and partner-focused goals. While this study measured *goal pursuit* (i.e., goal salience), it did not explicitly measure *goal achievement* per se; however, goal achievement is an important aspect of conflict processes and outcomes (Lakey & Canary, 2002). Future research should assess whether the associations between goal variability and conflict resolution are moderated by actual goal achievement. Additionally, to the extent that individuals desire to resolve their conflicts (though they may at times desire to keep them alive; Sillars, 1998), goal variability may itself help to predict goal achievement. The interplay between goal pursuit and

goal achievement seems ripe for investigation within the context of moment-by-moment perceptions of conflict episodes.

Returning to the specific patterns of association for partner and relationship goal incongruity with conflict resolution, it is possible that the divergent patterns for these two goal types may be rooted in the levels of concordance between each goal and other goal types. While partner goals are individualistic in character, relationship goals are dyadic. As such, it is possible that self and partner goals "trade off" in salience with other goals more so than relationship goals do. Indeed, research on multiple goals in relational discussions suggests that relationship goals may form a substantial part of the "background music" to ostensibly task-based interactions (Samp, 2013; Samp & Monahan, 2011).

In the case of partner goal incongruity, discrepancies between partners' concern for one another's goals indicates that partners are not equally attentive to supporting one another. Viewed in a different light, results for H3a indicated that partner goal *congruity* (i.e., partners' agreement about the importance of supporting one another) was associated with greater conflict resolution. This coheres with research indicating that sensitivity to a partner's goals is an important predictor of positive conflict negotiation (Bates & Samp, 2011; Lakey & Canary, 2002). Given that most individuals desire to uphold their own positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Samp & Solomon, 1999), a mutual partner focus facilitates the achievement of both partner's identity goals. Thus, the results for partner goal incongruity may reflect, in part, the concordance between individuals' identity goals and partner's concern for these goals.

Why then was relationship goal incongruity *positively* associated with conflict resolution and negatively associated with demand-withdrawal? Put differently, why was *greater* agreement about the importance of relationship goals associated with *less* effective conflict

negotiation? One possibility, while speculative, is that in some cases, high degrees of prosocial goal concern may actually be counterproductive to successful conflict negotiation. A post hoc dyadic analysis indicated that males' self and partner goal importance (averaged across all intervals) were positively associated with dyadic demand-withdrawal (females' goal importance ratings were not significantly associated with demand-withdrawal, possibly due to the high multicollinearity between females' goal rating scores). Thus, at least for males, desire to protect a partner's identity was associated with greater dyadic incidence of demand-withdrawal within the dyad. While partner goals are distinct from relationship goals, these goals often have similar associations with communicative outcomes (Keck & Samp, 2007). These results suggest that prosocial goals (i.e., protecting the partner or relationship) can at times be associated with less effective communication.

Further, this perspective is consistent with the notion that identity and relational concerns may at times lead to avoiding or withdrawing from forthright communication (Dillard, 2004; Wilson, 2002). While these prosocial concerns may help protect couples from explicitly harmful conflict behaviors (e.g., distributive tactics), they may also impede the ability to openly address important issues. Indeed, Bevan et al. (2007) argued that avoidance is a multifaceted behavior; at times, it may be motivated by antisocial or self-focused concerns (e.g., get my way or hurt my partner), while at other times it may flow from prosocial concerns (e.g., protecting my partner or relationship). A limitation of the current data is that because demand-withdrawal ratings were assigned to dyads (rather than individual partners), it is impossible to disentangle the roles of "demander" and "withdrawer" within each interaction. Nevertheless, the positive association between males' partner-focused goals and demand-withdrawal provides support for the view that prosocial goals do not uniformly promote positive communication during conflict. Too much

mutual focus on the importance of the relationship may actually distract couples from the task of resolving the specific conflict issues at hand (e.g., Dillard, 2004), leading to frustration and the use of unproductive conflict patterns. While this interpretation is speculative, it suggests a path for future research into the ways in which partners' goal pursuit tendencies may influence demand-withdrawal during conflict (e.g., Caughlin, 2010; Caughlin & Scott, 2010).

Sequential Goal-Message Linkages

(Some) Actor Goals Predict (Some) Subsequent Partner Goals

In addition to examining the associations between goal variability, goal incongruity, and conflict outcomes, I also investigated the ways in which individuals' and partners' goals and verbal messages may be sequentially linked during the course of interactions. Prior research has observed such linkages (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013), and Palomares (2009; 2011) has argued that inferences about a partners' goals may influence individuals' own goals. Individuals' goals at one time interval were predicted to be positively associated with the likelihood of a partner prioritizing the same goal at the next interval (H5). Results provided some support for the proposition that individuals' goals are associated with partners' later goals, though not necessarily in the manner predicted.

Females' partner- and relationship-focused goals at one minute were positively associated with the likelihood of males' focus on self goals at the next minute. Although these results were not as hypothesized, they cohere with the other evidence provided in this study that females' goals had a greater influence on males outcomes than males' goals had on females' outcomes. Additionally, this pattern makes sense within Palomares' (2011) tripartite *identical-concordant-discordant* goal framework. As females' partner goals at one time point were oriented toward their male partners' concerns, females' partner-focused goals and males' self-focused goals were

concordant. The path from females' prior partner goals to males' later self goals appears to reflect the manner in which an individual's pursuit of one goal may facilitate a partner's pursuit of a concordant goal.

The positive path from females' prior relationship-focused goals to males' subsequent self-focused goals does not initially appear to fit as cleanly into Palomares' (2011) tripartite framework, as relationship and self goals are not inherently concordant (and may perhaps be considered discordant in some cases). It is possible that this reflects males taking a more individualistic approach to conflict, compared to their female partners' more relational orientations. Research indicates that males tend to hold independent self-construals, viewing their identities in a primarily individualistic manner, whereas females tend to hold relational self-construals, viewing their identities as rooted in their relationships to significant others (Cross & Madson, 1997). Independent self-construals are associated with approaching conflict in a zero-sum manner, in which pursuit of one's goals necessitates the non-achievement of a partner's goals; conversely, relational self-construals are associated with seeking to integrate both partners' goals in a manner that promotes the health of the relationship (Gore & Cross, 2006; 2011). Research also indicates that males use fewer cooperative tactics during conflict than females do (Haferkamp, 1991), which again may reflect more individualistic approaches to conflict. Although the current study did not measure participants' self-construals, it is possible that in light of their more frequently independent self-construals, males may be apt to consider females' pursuit of relational goals as threatening, rather than facilitating, achievement of males' own goals. This could lead to males redoubling their efforts at pursuing self-focused goals, while potentially creating frustration for female partners who are attempting to pursue mutual goal fulfillment. That said, if the argument presented here about the relationship between self-

construals and conflict behaviors is correct, we should also expect to see males with relational self-construals approaching conflict in more collaborative and relationally-affirming ways, and females with independent self-construals enacting more competitive zero-sum approaches to conflict. Might self-construals moderate the degree to which individuals' goals are associated with a partner's subsequent goals in conflict (e.g., Keck & Samp, 2007)? This represents an intriguing line of investigation for future research.

Verbal Message Focus Did Not Mediate Goal-Goal Linkages

Despite the evidence observed that some actor goals were associated with subsequent partner goals, no evidence was observed that verbal message focus mediated goal-goal links. This was the case despite the observation of several links between individuals' goals and their simultaneous verbal message focus. Specifically, males' partner and relationship goals were associated with increased levels of partner-interested verbal focus at the same minute. Additionally, females' partner goals were associated with increased relationship-focused verbal communication (though interestingly, not with increased partner-interested communication) during the same interval. Finally, females' self goals were linked to increased verbal task focus during the same minute.

Despite the above links between individuals' goals and verbal messages, verbal message focus did not mediate these links in any of the cases examined. Unexpectedly, in only one case (i.e., males' partner goals and partner-interest verbal ratings) were individuals' goals straightforwardly reflected in their verbal messages during the same minute. While it is possible that at times some individuals did not outwardly express their inward states (Coles & Samp, 2011), nevertheless, these results were inconsistent with prior theory and research on goals and message production (Berger, 1997; Dillard, 2004). The failure to observe *any* significant

mediational associations was quite surprising, in light of past work demonstrating links between goals and verbal message features, and between individuals' goals at one time and a partners' later goals (e.g., Samp, 2013). It is quite likely that the ability to observe mediational relationships was due, in part, to lower-than-desirable inter-rater reliability for some of the message focus ratings. For instance, while the male partner-interest and female task-focus verbal measures had excellent reliabilities, the other categories fell into the fair-to-good range, and the female self-interest, female partner-interest, and female relationship-focus verbal measures had only marginally-acceptable reliabilities. Interestingly, the male partner-interest and female task-focus verbal measures, which had the highest reliabilities, represented two of the three verbal focus measures associated with individuals' goals. This strongly suggests that more reliable measures of verbal focus might have yielded other significant links between goals and verbal messages, allowing for the observation of the hypothesized mediation process predicted in H6. I explore possible avenues for improving the rating process in the discussion of limitations and future directions.

Despite the failure to observe verbal messages mediating goal-goal linkages between partners in the current study, the theoretical basis for the claim forwarded in H6 remains strong. In concert with past research, (e.g., Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013), this study provided further evidence that individuals' momentary goals do influence their own momentary messages, *and* that their goals may influence a partners' later goals. The current study, along with the two by Samp and colleagues, illuminates the influence of interaction goals on both intrapersonal (i.e., own messages) and interpersonal (i.e., partner's goals) aspects of the communication process during challenging relational discussions. This mounting evidence leads to a strong a priori rationale for verbal message features as a potential mediator of the impact of one individual's

goals on another's subsequent goals. That said, it is likely that such an impact of individuals'

messages on partners' later goals, even if mediated via verbal messages, would also be

dependent on partners' goal inferences. Verbal messages serve as one basis for inferences about

a partner's goals (Palomares, 2009). However, other interaction features, such as the specificity

of a partner's goals (e.g., abstract versus concrete; Palomares, 2013), contextual features of the

interaction (Palomares, 2008), cognitive busyness and goal congruency (Palomares, 2011) may

also influence goal inferences.

These considerations imply, first, that the link between an individual's goals and a

partner's inferences of those goals may be complex, irreducible to single features of an

interaction (e.g., verbal messages). Second, although individuals' goals may be influenced by a

partner's goals, inferring a partner's goal accurately in no way guarantees that one will

necessarily pursue that same goal (Palomares, 2013). Indeed, incorrect goal inferences could

play a particularly important role in serial argumentation; to the extent that individuals

misunderstand what their partners are attempting to accomplish, conflicts may be perpetuated,

and arguers may fail to understand the reasons for a partner's behaviors or for the intractability

of the conflict (e.g., Sillars, 1998). While verbal messages may be one aspect of the link between

individuals' and partners' goals, a number of cognitive, contextual and communicative elements

may potentially mediate these associations. Thus, in addition to refining methods for assessing

verbal message features as a potential mediator of actor-partner goal linkages, future work

should consider other possible paths by which individuals' goals may influence a partner's goals.

Limitations and Future Directions

While this study broke new ground in assessing the implications of goal variability and

goal incongruity on conflict negotiation, it did have several limitations. One limitation concerned

the nature of the sample. As the sample was composed of college-aged heterosexual romantic couples, the results observed here might not straightforwardly generalize to older, non-romantic, or non-heterosexual samples. Additionally, because participation was voluntary, the study was likely to recruit couples who were relatively satisfied with their relationships and felt comfortable engaging in a video-recorded discussion of a current relational problem. It is probable that severely distressed couples, who are arguably most in need of research in order to identify ways to improve conflict processes in such relationships, would have been more reticent to take part in such a study compared to healthy couples. Future research should seek to replicate this study's approach in samples with greater diversity in terms of age, relationship type, educational attainment, sexual orientation, and couple well-being.

Another potential limitation concerns the manner in which participants reported their goals during their argumentative episodes. Participants reported their goals at one-minute intervals. This time window was chosen to allow for capturing substantial goal variability without overly taxing participants, as well as providing continuity with prior research on goal variability during interaction (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013). It is *possible* that utilizing shorter intervals (e.g., 30 seconds) might have captured more nuanced fluctuations in goal states. However, research to date has observed higher rates of goal shifts from one interval to the next when utilizing one-minute intervals (Keck & Samp, 2007; Samp, 2013), compared to 30-second intervals (Waldron, 1997). Further, the observation of several autoregressive effects (i.e., individuals goals predicting their focus on the same goal in the next minute) in the current study suggests that goal states may demonstrate some level of stability from one minute to the next. These considerations actually militate against the assumption that smaller time windows would have necessarily led to observing greater variation between intervals. Indeed, for cognitions or

behaviors which are somewhat stable over time, windows which are too short may actually lead to underestimating the degree of variability in these phenomena. As such, while future research should explore the possibility that different interval lengths might yield different patterns of goal variability, the reliance on one-minute intervals does not appear to have constituted a major limitation in this study.

Further, as noted previously, inter-rater reliability was lower than desired for a number of the verbal message focus ratings. This may have attenuated the ability to observe associations between goals and verbal message features in the sequential analyses. It is quite likely that reliance on one-minute intervals contributed to the lower reliabilities. A number of the verbal message raters suggested that individuals' verbal focus varied substantially during many of the one-minute intervals, making judgments for such intervals difficult. Although a rating scale approach (rather than categorical coding) was utilized in order to reduce the decisional complexity of verbal focus judgments within the intervals (Bakeman & Quera, 2011), forming reliable judgments of minute-long intervals appeared to be a challenge for most coders.

It might be helpful to utilize timed-event coding (see Bakeman & Quera, 2011) in future research, as this method would allow for precisely pinpointing the onset and offset of goal states and verbal utterances (considered categorically). Also, future coding efforts would likely benefit from the use of transcribed textual data, rather than direct observation of video-recorded interactions. A number of the raters indicated that, despite their best efforts and clear instruction to the contrary, they struggled on some occasions to focus solely on verbal message features and avoid having their ratings influenced by nonverbal behaviors and/or a partners' messages during a given interval. Several times during training, raters stated that while a communicator's verbal messages indicated one type of focus, they believed that the communicator's nonverbal

behaviors gave better evidence of "what they were really trying to do." Although global assessments of communicators' intentions may be appropriate to some research contexts (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997), in the current study more reliable message-specific data were required. Despite efforts to disentangle judgements about verbal messages from judgments about goals, it appears in retrospect that some of the verbal ratings were influenced by raters' perceptions of goals rather than simply verbal features per se. Utilizing transcripts of communicators' verbal communication would allow for raters to evaluate individuals' messages free of the potentially contaminating influences of nonverbal behavior and/or partners' messages. Transcribed data would also allow for greater flexibility in unitizing data; data could be unitized at the level of utterances, talk-turns, or timed intervals. Once reliably unitized by independent coders, raters could be provided with pre-unitized data to begin coding. This approach would standardize the coding process and remove the burden of simultaneously unitizing and evaluating data that is common in observations of live interaction.

Additionally, the manner in which individuals' goals were reported influenced the types of analyses available in this study. For a given interval, participants ranked the importance of each goal in an ordinal fashion (i.e., 1 = *most important*; 4 = *least important*). While I believe this method is consistent with a multiple goals framework (e.g., Dillard, 2004), nevertheless, measuring the importance of each goal on a continuous scale would allow for identifying potentially meaningful *goal combinations*, in which particular sets of goals are rated as equally important at a given time (as in Keck & Samp, 2007). Along with the inability to observe goal combinations, the ordinal nature of the goal ratings also introduced computational complexities in the logistic regression analyses linking individuals' goals with partners' later goals (H5). The non-independent nature of the ratings for each participant within each interval necessitated

removing task-focused goals as predictors in the analyses. Utilizing continuous ratings of goal importance would allow incorporating all goal types as predictors in a given model, though this approach of course opens the door to the risk of multicollinearity between goal measures. Further, while this study measured *goal pursuit* (i.e., goal salience), it did not explicitly measure *goal achievement* per se; however, goal achievement is an important aspect of conflict processes and outcomes (Lakey & Canary, 2002). Future research should assess whether the associations between goal variability and conflict resolution are moderated by actual goal achievement. Additionally, to the extent that individuals desire to resolve their conflicts (though they may at times desire to keep them alive; Sillars, 1998), goal variability may itself help to predict goal achievement. The interplay between goal pursuit and goal achievement seems ripe for investigation within the context of moment-by-moment perceptions of conflict episodes.

An additional limitation concerned the measurement of the conflict outcomes. Conflict resolution was measured at one point in time, following the conclusion of argumentative episodes. However, serial arguments persist over time (Johnson & Roloff, 1998), and discrete conflict episodes may be linked together in individuals' perceptions to constitute long-running relational conflict patterns (Hample et al., 2012; Honeycutt, 2003). As such, it would be interesting to observe to what extent the perceptions of conflict resolution examined here may vary over time, as well as whether individuals may manifest particular "goal tendencies" that persist across multiple interactions (Caughlin, 2010). Additionally, as noted previously, demand-withdrawal scores were assigned on the dyadic level. As such, it was not possible to distinguish between individual-level demand and withdrawal behaviors (i.e., male-demand/female-withdraw vs. female-demand/male withdraw). Yet demand and withdrawal behaviors often vary by sex (Eldridge & Christensen, 2002), and communicators' conflict goals may have implications for

individual-level demand and withdrawal behavior (Caughlin & Scott, 2010; Huggins & Samp, 2013). Thus, analysis of individual demand and withdrawal behavior would allow more nuanced insights into the relations between individual goals, goal variability, and dyadic goal congruity and males' and females' demand-withdrawal behaviors.

Finally, the current study advanced understandings of the processes by which momentary interaction goals help to shape conflict processes and outcomes in the laboratory. At the same time, while steps were taken to ensure that the laboratory setting was as true to everyday communicative contexts as possible (e.g., living room set up of the laboratory, allowing participants to select a current relational issue to discuss, etc.), stimulating conflict in the laboratory is admittedly somewhat artificial. The semi-structured discussions relied on in this study may not necessarily reflect serial argument processes as they emerge spontaneously in everyday interactions (e.g., Trapp & Hoff, 1985). Nevertheless, on the whole I consider the laboratory context a strength of this study. Whereas much previous research has relied on retrospective reports of naturally-occurring serial argument episodes (e.g., Johnson & Roloff, 1998; Bevan, 2010), the current investigation allowed for detailed examination of conflict processes as they unfolded in real time.

Using methods similar to those employed in the current study, future research could examine the role of interaction partners' shifting goals in shaping communication in a wide array of contexts, involving both strangers and close relationship partners. Possible contexts for sequential goal-based investigation include relational initiation (Mongeau, Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004), relational maintenance (Guerrero & Afifi, 1998), support seeking and support provision (Guntzviller & MacGeorge, 2013), provider-patient interaction (Sabee, Bylund, Weber, & Sonet, 2012), information seeking and disclosure decisions (Afifi & Afifi, 2009), and bargaining and

negotiation (Dunbar & Abra, 2010). A more immediate extension would involve replicating the general design of the current study, but soliciting information from participants not only on their own goals at a given time point, but also about their perceptions of their partners' goals at the same time. Collecting this data would enable direct examination of the role that inferences about partners' goals, as well as *variability* in these inferences, may play in shaping individuals' own cognitions, affect, and behaviors during conflict. This approach would also allow for comparison between the roles of actual versus perceived goal incongruity as potential contributors to the conflict process. This vein of research would open doors for more fully integrating message production (e.g., Samp, 2013) and message processing (e.g., Palomares, 2009) perspectives on goal-driven communication, an integration which could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic role that goals play within dyadic interaction.

Conclusion

This study began by noting that although a belief in the presence and variation of multiple goals during communicative interactions is virtually axiomatic among communication scholars, the substantive effects of these shifting, multiple goals on interaction dynamics are still not well-understood. This study advanced understanding of these issues by explicitly examining the roles of within-person goal variability and between-person goal (in)congruity in shaping conflict interactions about serial argument topics. The results of this investigation highlight the importance of examining goal processes on both moment-by-moment and global levels within interactions, and accounting for both partners' constantly-shifting goals in seeking to understand both momentary (e.g., verbal message focus) and interaction-level (e.g., conflict resolution, demand-withdrawal) communicative outcomes. In particular, the concepts of goal variability and

goal (in)congruity appear capable of shining light on previously under-explored foundations of dyadic interaction.

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APPENDIX A: IDENTIFICATION OF SERIAL ARGUMENT PROTOCOL

Before proceeding, please read the definition of "serial argument" below (if you have any questions about the meaning of the term "serial argument," please ask the researcher for clarification).

Definition: "A *serial argument* exists when individuals argue or engage in conflict about the same topic over time, during which they participate in several (at least two) arguments about the topic"

In the space below, please list up to 5 *current* serial arguments in your relationship with the partner who came with you today. These may be serious or relatively minor arguments, but they should be issues that you have argued about more than once, and have not yet fully resolved.

1._____

_____

2._____

_____

3._____

_____

4._____

_____

5._____

_____

***STOP*. DO NOT PROCEED TO THE NEXT PAGE. PLEASE INFORM THE RESEARCHER WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED WITH THIS PAGE.**

6. The issue that my partner and I have agreed to discuss today is:

_____

_____

APPENDIX B: GOAL IMPORTANCE MEASURE

During *this* one-minute interval in the discussion, which of the following goals was *most*

important to you?

a) It was important for me to assert my interest and needs

b) It was important for me to make sure that my partner was okay given the situation

c) It was important for me to "focus on us" and keep my relationship together

d) It was important for us deal with the issue

Legend:

a) Self-oriented goal

b) Other-oriented goal

c) Relational goal

d) Task goal

APPENDIX C: VERBAL MESSAGE FOCUS RATING SCHEME

Instructions for raters:

The verbal message focus of each partners' messages will rated at one-minute intervals. View the interval in its entirety, and assign a judgment of the degree to which each partners' verbal messages during that interval reflect **each** of the following focuses: *self-interest, partner-interest, relationship-focus,* and *task-focus*. In order to facilitate clarity in your judgments, you should watch each interval twice, focusing on only one partner on each pass (i.e., two views total for each interval).

For each one-minute interval, you will rate the degree to which each partner's verbal messages illustrated self-interest, partner-interest, relationship-focus, and task-focus. The fundamental principle for assigning the degree of focus is determined by the *primary referent* of the speaker's messages. That is, ratings are not assigned based only on microlinguistic features (e.g., use of "I" versus "you" or "we"), but rather based on the primary entity (i.e., self-interest, partner-interest, relationship, or task) being referred to by the speaker during that interval. Although microlinguistic features may give clues to the primary referent, they do not determine the substance of the referent. Take, for example, the message "*I* think that we need to be careful this conflict doesn't damage our *relationship.*" Although this statement includes a microlinguistic reference to the speaker's self (e.g., "I"), the primary referent of the statement concerns the relationship. Thus, ratings should reflect the relatively high degree of relationship focus embodied in this message.

<u>Ratings are assigned using the following scale</u>:

    1 = Low focus

    2 = Moderately low focus

    3 = Moderate focus

    4 = Moderately high focus

    5 = High focus

It is important to note that ratings are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for a speaker's verbal messages to be high (or low) on multiple dimensions simultaneously.

<u>Message Characteristics</u>:

1) *Self-interest*

Self-interest refers to the degree to which an individual's verbal messages focus on "getting my way" or "pursuing my own interests." It is clear that the speaker is seeking to achieve his or her own goals. Note that a self-interested message may reference the speaker's partner, but in a way that conveys the speaker's focus is on furthering his or her own goals. For instance, a speaker might say, "I am so tired of you saying that. Why can't you leave me alone and let me do what I want to do?" Although this message is directed toward the partner, the focus of the message is about the speaker's own desires and interests. Therefore, this message would be rated as high in self-interest.

    *Note that a self-interested speaker CAN simultaneously pursue a partner's interests (as described below).

2) *Partner-interest**

Partner-interest refers to the degree to which an individual's verbal messages focus on furthering a partner's interests. This can take the form of helping the partner achieve his or her stated goals ("I think that's a great idea!" or "I want you to do what you want to do"). However, it is not necessary that the partner necessarily state or even agree with the speaker's perspective or advice. The point is that the speaker appears to be focused on what he or she thinks would be best for (or supportive of) the partner. For instance, unwanted advice would still be considered a form of partner-interested message. Although the partner may not want the advice, the speaker clearly intends it to benefit the partner. Note also that a partner-interested message may reference the speaker's own perspective, when that perspective is focused on the partner's interests. For example, a speaker might very strongly insist, "I know you hate it when I say this, but I don't think your best friend is good for you!" Although the speaker forcefully advances his or her perspective (and uses "I" language), the message itself is intended by the speaker to further the partner's best interests (as understood by the speaker).

*Note that a partner-interested speaker CAN simultaneously pursue his or her own interests (described above).

3) *Relationship-focus*

Relationship-focused messages are centered on managing the dyadic relationship between the partners. The speaker's primary emphasis will appear to be on maintaining a satisfactory relationship with his or her partner, or mitigating or repairing relational damage due to the conflict. Relationship-focused messages will often (though not always) use words such as "We," "Our," and "Us." It is important to distinguish between a focus on the interests of one of

the relational partners as an *individual* (which should be rated as either self-interest or partner-interest), versus on the higher-order goal of maintaining the *relationship* as a unit.

4) *Task-focus*

Task-focus refers to the degree to which a speakers messages emphasize making progress toward completing the "task at hand." In the context of conflict, this will involve a focus on resolving the issue under discussion. Task-focused messages will frequently involve exchanging arguments for or against a particular decision or course of action. They may also involving highlight procedural issues (e.g., "Let's stay on topic" or "I'll present my side, then you present yours"). The primary referent is the *task itself*, rather than the identities/interests of the communicators working toward the task, or the state of their relationship.

APPENDIX D: DEMAND-WITHDRAWAL CODING SCHEME

(Taken directly from Malik & Lindhal, 2000)

COUPLE CODE: PURSUIT/WITHDRAWAL PATTERN

In the pursuit/withdrawal pattern of communication, one partner presses the other partner to discuss an issue and requests change through a variety of behaviors that can include demands, nagging statements, and complaints (pursuit). While one partner is pursuing the other to communicate, the other partner attempts to avoid discussing the problem by withdrawing -- changing the topic to something more neutral, denying the problem, avoiding eye contact, folding arms across one's chest, getting distracted by extraneous stimuli (e.g., looking at the carpet, fiddling with hair, nails, wallet, or purse), mumbling responses, sliding down in a chair, becoming silent, leaving the room, and/or refusing to discuss the matter further. Pursuit/withdrawal is related to couple interactions wherein one partner actively seeks to discuss a charged topic and the withdrawing partner shuts down, either by neutralizing the content so as to neutralize affect, or by refusing to or being unable to engage in the discussion. Verbal examples of withdrawal include statements such as, "I don't see any point in discussing this issue any further," "I don't want to talk about it," "I don't see how that is relevant," and "Why do you have to bring this up again?"

1 - Very Low. When one partner brings up an issue or attempts to discuss a topic, the other is not seen to avoid the topic.

2 - Low. When one partner brings up an issue or attempts to discuss a topic, the other partner, on one or two occasions, is seen to make attempts to avoid the topic by changing the topic, withdrawing, denying elements of the problem, becoming silent, or being slow to respond.

However, the withdrawing partner is fairly readily re-engaged by the pursuing partner, who never reaches the point of nagging or making serious complaints. Instead, there may be a bit of cajoling or a repetition of a request in order to engage the other partner.

3 - Moderate. When one partner brings up an issue or attempts to discuss a topic, the other is seen on several occasions to make efforts to avoid the issue or topic. Pursuit behaviors may include some mild nagging statements, demands, or complaints. Withdrawal behaviors may include some statements indicative of efforts to change the topic, some denial, avoiding eye contact, folding arms across one's chest, getting distracted by extraneous stimuli (e.g., looking at the carpet, wall, or ceiling, fiddling with hair, nails, wallet, or purse), mumbling responses, being slow to respond, or becoming silent.

4 - Moderately High. When one partner brings up an issue or attempts to discuss a topic, the other partner around half the time makes efforts to avoid the issue or topic. Pursuit behaviors may include some moderately negative nagging statements, demands, or complaints. Withdrawal behaviors include the occurrence of the following behaviors: changing the topic, denying the problem, avoiding eye contact, folding arms across one's chest, getting distracted by extraneous stimuli (e.g., looking at the carpet, wall, or ceiling, fiddling with hair, nails, wallet, or purse), mumbling responses, becoming silent and tense, leaving the room, and/or refusing to discuss the matter further.

5 - High. When one partner brings up an issue or attempts to discuss a topic, the other is seen more than half of the time to make efforts to avoid the issue or topic. Pursuit behaviors may include some moderately to highly negative nagging statements, demands, or complaints. Withdrawal behaviors may include changing the topic, denying the problem, avoidance of eye contact, folding arms across one's chest, getting distracted by extraneous stimuli (e.g., looking at

the carpet, fiddling with hair, nails, wallet, or purse), mumbling responses, becoming silent, leaving the room, and/or stubbornly refusing to discuss the matter further. The pursuit and withdrawal roles are clear, obvious, and easy to identify. The pursuit/withdrawal pattern should be fairly pervasive throughout the discussion. There is a fair amount of underlying tension in the interaction. (The primary difference between a code of 4 and 5 is the amount of time the partner withdraws: less than half the time for a code of 4 versus more than half the time for a code of 5. Also note the difference in intensity of pursuit behaviors.)