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## Partner's understanding of affective–cognitive meta-bases predicts relationship quality

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### Abstract

Knowledge that partners have about each other's attitudes are consequential for relationship quality. This article extends prior research and examines whether knowledge regarding a partner's meta-attitudinal bases, or subjective perceptions of how one's attitudes are driven, can influence relationship quality. Given how meta-bases are reflective of information-processing goals, we hypothesized that partner understanding of meta-attitudinal bases would positively predict relationship quality. Self and partner ratings of how relationally relevant attitudes were driven, as well as perceptions of relationship quality, were assessed. Results revealed that a partner's knowledge of one's meta-bases positively predicts one's own reported relationship quality. Results remained significant when controlling for relationship duration and meta-bases similarity. Implications of meta-bases understanding for close relationship functioning are discussed.

Partner understanding is important in highly interdependent relationships where romantic partners interact with one another on a daily and intimate basis (Thomas & Fletcher, 2003), and converging lines of research suggest that partners' perceptions and knowledge of each other are central in their evaluations of their relationships (e.g., Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Gagné & Lydon, 2004; West & Kenny, 2011). Much research suggests that being understood by a romantic partner is associated with increases in relationship quality. Importantly, research on understanding has taken on two distinct forms: responsiveness, where people *feel* understood by others, and knowledge, where people have accurate knowledge of their partners (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011;

Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). In this study, we define understanding in terms of knowledge, where partner understanding is conceptualized as the extent to which a person's self-perceptions are known by his or her partner, often operationalized as the agreement between a person's self-rating on target attributes (e.g., personality traits) and his or her partner's ratings of the person on these same attributes (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Katz & Joiner, 2002; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Sanbonmatsu, Uchino, Wong, & Seo, 2012; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

Most of the research in the area of interpersonal perception has focused on how knowledge of specific partner traits might influence relationship functioning (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Kenny, 1994). However, we explored the possibility of another aspect of partner knowledge that may also have a significant impact on relationship functioning: knowledge of a partner's meta-attitudinal bases. Just as individuals bring their own attitudes into any relationship and hold differing opinions regarding attitudinal issues, close partners also bring into their relationships

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their own metacognitive assessments of their attitudinal bases, or whether they believe their own attitudes tend to be more influenced by affect or cognition. For example, an individual might perceive that their opinions about a relationship-relevant issue such as contraception use is driven by their emotions (“I like using contraception because it makes me feel more relaxed during sex instead of worrying about unwanted pregnancy”) to a greater degree than by their beliefs (“I like using contraception because research has shown its effectiveness in preventing pregnancy”).

These assessments have been found to reflect interest in affective or cognitive information and information-processing goals that are associated with attitudes and consequently, persuasion as well as decision making (e.g., See, Petty, & Fabrigar, 2008, 2013). In addition to insight into one’s own meta-attitudinal bases, we believe that knowledge of the meta-attitudinal bases of one’s partner is functional, and may enable individuals to anticipate, influence, and respond to their partners’ processing goals more effectively. However, to our knowledge, interpartner knowledge of meta-attitudinal bases has not been examined previously. Do partners in close relationships have knowledge about each other’s meta-attitudinal bases and is this knowledge associated with relationship quality? This study attempts to extend the literature regarding interpersonal perception within close relationships by answering this question.

### *Partner understanding and relationship quality*

The extent to which one is understood accurately by a partner has been established to be an important contributor to one’s positive perceptions of relationship quality (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001; De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Decuyper, De Bolle, & De Fruyt, 2012; Finkenauer & Righetti, 2009; Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009) as well as relationship stability (Neff & Karney, 2005). Furthermore, relationship partners have been found to be moderately knowledgeable in perceiving partner attributes across a variety of domains (see Fletcher & Kerr, 2010),

and intuitively, there is appeal to the idea that accurate knowledge of partner attributes contributes to relationship quality.

However, findings from research examining the links between understanding and relationship quality have been mixed. For example, several studies have reported a weak or non-significant link between understanding and relationship quality (e.g., Ickes & Simpson, 2001; Murray et al., 1996; Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003). On the other hand, past research has also highlighted various reasons why partner understanding contributes positively to one’s sense of relationship quality. For example, being understood in terms of one’s traits and personality can enhance relationship satisfaction (Decuyper et al., 2012). Furthermore, individuals whose sexual preferences were more accurately perceived by their partner report greater sexual satisfaction (de Jong & Reis, 2014). Partner understanding also increases validation of one’s self-concept (Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Angulo, 2007; Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992), which positively predicts relationship quality (Katz & Joiner, 2002; Letzring & Nofhle, 2010). That is, the more one is understood by one’s partner, the more confidence one has that one’s self-perceptions are accurate. Such self-verification might, in turn, lead one to trust one partner’s judgments more or perceive greater authenticity in the relationship (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Swann et al., 1994). In addition, self-verification of an individual’s self-esteem by his or her partner has also been shown to increase his or her own relationship commitment and intimacy (Katz & Joiner, 2002). Finally, understanding provides individuals with a sense of control and predictability, which have been found to be key in successful relationships (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992).

In a similar manner, due to the functional nature of attitudes in guiding behavior, recent studies have examined the consequences of partners’ understanding regarding one’s attitudes on relationships (Sanbonmatsu, Uchino, & Birmingham, 2011; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012). The more partners’ perceptions of participants’ attitudes correspond to

participants' own self-reported attitudes, the less fighting and conflict participants observed in their relationships (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012). Going a step further, although knowing attitudes can provide insight into partners' positive or negative evaluations, it is also important to know how partners reach their evaluations, that is, the type of information or processing goal that partners rely on to arrive at their evaluations.

### *Meta-attitudinal bases and partner understanding*

Past research has established that beyond valence, the different properties of attitudes matter for outcomes ranging from information processing to persuasion to behavior (see Fabrigar, MacDonald, & Wegener, 2005; Petty & Krosnick, 1995). In other words, attitudes alone do not predict behavior. Of particular relevance to this study, one such property is the extent to which people perceive their attitudes to be dominated by their emotions or their beliefs, or their meta-attitudinal bases (meta-bases for short; See, Petty, et al., 2008, 2013). Individuals with more affective meta-bases perceive that they rely on emotions to a greater extent than beliefs; individuals with more cognitive meta-bases perceive that they rely on beliefs to a greater extent than emotions. Meta-bases are measured by obtaining responses to two sets of questions. One set of questions asks participants for their perceptions about the extent to which their attitudes toward various attitude objects are driven by beliefs. The other set of questions asks participants for their perceptions about the degree to which their attitudes are driven by emotions across the same variety of attitude objects. Standardized values for an individual's averaged responses to the emotions and beliefs questions are then used to obtain a measure of emotional or belief reliance. Hence, meta-bases reflect primary information-processing goals that are associated with the way people process information when making decisions or attitudinal judgments.

Of importance, meta-bases have implications for people's receptivity to arguments and the way they form new preferences.

For example, individuals who had affective meta-bases were more persuaded to be in favor of blood donation after reading an emotions-focused message compared to a beliefs-focused one (See et al., 2008). People's meta-bases also predicted the extent to which they relied on either affective or cognitive qualities in forming new preferences for different movies, especially when they were deliberative in forming their preferences (See et al., 2008). Furthermore, individuals who had cognitive meta-bases rated beliefs-focused arguments against binge drinking more favorably (e.g., more interesting, more meaningful to them, and worth remembering) compared to emotions-focused arguments that also advocated against binge drinking (Keer, van den Putte, Neijens, & de Wit, 2013). Finally, some research has also shown that the greater the extent to which people perceive their attitudes to be driven by affect, the more time they tend to spend on reading information that they expect to elicit emotions, thus suggesting that meta-bases reflect people's intention for processing one type of information over another (See, Petty, et al., 2013).

Given how meta-bases are functional and reflective of information-processing goals, we suggest that partner understanding of affective–cognitive meta-bases could contribute positively to relationship quality. For example, having a partner who has accurate knowledge of such perceptions might enable the partner to tailor a discussion to match the individual's meta-bases, and this could increase the individual's willingness to listen to any arguments and, ultimately, would increase persuasion. Furthermore, because meta-bases reflect subjective perceptions that individuals are aware of, individuals could communicate such perceptions explicitly to their partners, and any tailoring by the partner might increase perceptions of the partner as responsive (Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012), with positive consequences for relationship quality.

### *Current Research*

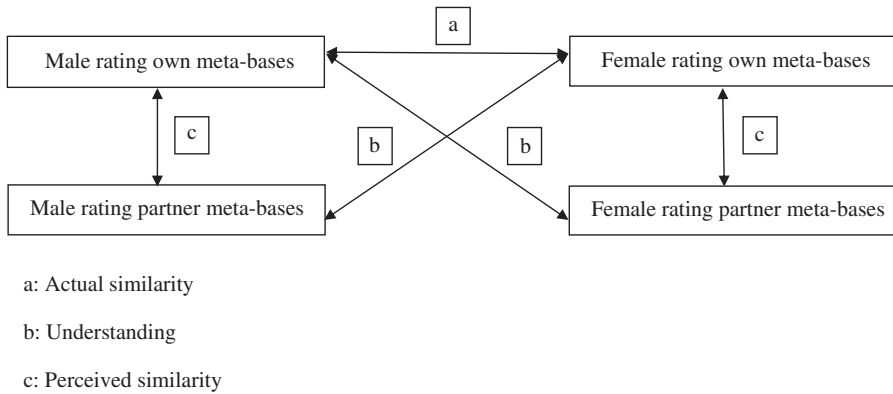
Although there is no direct past evidence on the effects of partner understanding of processing goals on relationship quality, there

is indirect evidence suggesting that partner knowledge of personal goal pursuits positively impacts relationship quality (see Righetti, Rusbult, & Finkenauer, 2010). According to interdependence theory, relationship partners have extensive opportunities to facilitate or obstruct each other's goal pursuits (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), and the more one is accurately understood by one's partner, the better equipped one's partner is to help achieve one's goals. This is especially salient when considering the Michelangelo phenomenon, which is a process whereby close partners help one another achieve their ideal selves. Indeed, research demonstrates how partner affirmation and verification facilitate progress on achieving ideal self-goals and this, in turn, leads to experiencing greater relationship well-being (e.g., Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). In addition, research on social support and goal support shows that perspective-taking facilitates support and promotes goal progress of partners, leading to increased relationship quality (Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Koestner, Powers, Carbonneau, Milyavskaya, & Chua, 2012; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010). Thus, being understood promotes how partners can facilitate each other effectively and thus promotes relationship quality (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1998). Hence, we sought to examine partner understanding of how individuals function and process goals in terms of affective–cognitive meta-bases.

We predicted that, overall, romantic partners would be relatively knowledgeable about each other's meta-bases. Moreover, we examined the unique contribution of understanding on multiple indices of relationship quality by testing for both *actor effects* (e.g., Sally understands Harry and this predicts Sally's relationship quality) and *partner effects* (e.g., Sally understands Harry and this predicts Harry's relationship quality). A recent meta-analysis found that in terms of actor effects, there was a nonsignificant link between understanding and relationship quality,  $r = .03$  (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010). This meta-analysis corroborates past research

showing how actor effects of understanding on relationship quality are generally weak (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011). In contrast, there is reason to expect strong partner effects. As mentioned, self-verification research has consistently found positive effects of understanding on relationship quality and defined understanding in terms of how well perceivers predicted target's self-views, which is essentially a partner effect (e.g., De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; Gill & Swann, 2004; Swann et al., 1994). Moreover, research examining both actor and partner effects of understanding on relationship quality has shown consistently that partner effects predict relationship quality, whereas actor effects tend not to do so (de Jong & Reis, 2014; Letzring & Nofhle, 2010; Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012). Hence, we did not advance any predictions concerning understanding of one's partner's meta-bases (i.e., actor effect) and its association with self-reported relationship quality. We predicted that greater understanding of one's meta-bases by a partner (i.e., partner effect) would be positively associated with self-reported relationship quality.

Importantly, a considerable body of research has shown that similarity has positive effects on relationships, such as increased attraction, increased satisfaction, and longer lasting relationships (Acitelli et al., 2001; Decuyper et al., 2012; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Although similarity might be closely related to understanding, such that partners who are similar to one another might also be able to develop understanding regarding each other's meta-bases, similarity and understanding are different constructs (see Figure 1). It is also worth noting that in prior research that included both similarity and understanding as predictors of relationship quality (such that the effects of each predictor is considered while controlling for the effects of the other), the effects of similarity on relationship quality have been mixed, but the effects of understanding on relationship quality have been consistent (Iafrate, Bertoni, Donato, & Finkenauer, 2012; Iafrate, Bertoni, Margola, Cigoli, & Acitelli, 2010; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2012). Hence, we examined whether meta-bases understanding was



**Figure 1.** Measures of interpersonal perception.

predictive of relationship quality independent of similarity.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 50 heterosexual dating couples who were students at the National University of Singapore. Potential participants were recruited through fliers and e-mail messages. Age of participants ranged from 19 to 29 ( $M = 21.68$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ) and relationship duration at participation ranged from 1 to 85 months ( $M = 16.41$  months,  $SD = 16.90$ ). Participants were paid \$10 each for participation.

### Procedure

All participants were required to be in a romantic relationship at the time of their participation and they came to the laboratory with their partner. The couple members were then directed to separate cubicles to complete the study individually. Upon providing informed consent, participants proceeded to complete questionnaires assessing their relationship quality. They then completed items assessing meta-bases understanding and similarity regarding several attitude objects, with the order of objects randomized across participants. Finally, participants completed demographic questions before being debriefed and thanked for their participation.

## Measures

### Relationship quality

To measure current relationship quality, we used the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000), which contains items assessing the constructs of satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, love, and romance. Each of these constructs is measured using three items (e.g., “How satisfied are you with your relationship?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), with higher scores indicating greater perceived quality of the relationship. Items were summed and averaged to provide individual scores for each component as well as an overall index of relationship quality. The internal reliability for this measure overall was .88, and the  $\alpha_s$  of each subscale ranged from .69 to .90. See Table 1 for obtained means and standard deviations.

### Closeness

The Inclusion-of-Other-in-the-Self (IOS) Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), a single-item pictorial measure, was used to measure relationship closeness as another dependent variable. The IOS Scale presents seven Venn diagrams representing varying degrees of overlap between one circle labeled “self” and another circle labeled “other” (i.e., relationship partner). These seven diagrams range from *complete nonoverlap* (1) to *nearly complete overlap* (7) between the two circles,

**Table 1.** Unstandardized parameter estimates for actors' and partners' meta-bases understanding predicting relationship quality

	<i>M (SD)</i>	Actor effects ( <i>b</i> )	Partner effects ( <i>b</i> )
Relationship quality	5.77 (0.63)	0.04	0.43*
Satisfaction	5.90 (0.89)	0.11	0.64*
Commitment	6.26 (0.74)	0.14	0.70*
Love	6.29 (0.72)	0.06	0.46*
Trust	6.10 (0.88)	0.34	0.61*
Intimacy	5.84 (0.78)	0.16	0.49*
Passion	5.00 (1.12)	-0.11	0.11
Romance	5.01 (0.97)	-0.41	-0.01
Closeness	5.16 (1.36)	1.09*	0.52

\* $p < .05$ .

and participants indicate which diagram best describes their relationship.

#### *Meta-bases*

Participants were asked to report on their *own* meta-bases with respect to seven attitudes (See et al., 2008): marriage, having babies, spending money on luxury items, physical intimacy, prolonged physical separation, distrust, and smoking. These items were selected because of their relevance to relationships (Etcheverry & Agnew, 2009; Gill & Swann, 2004) and were adapted from research by Kurdek (1994) regarding topics of conflict between couple members. To measure participants' meta-bases, participants responded to two single-item questions for each attitude object (1 = *not at all driven by*, 11 = *completely driven by*). To measure affective meta-bases, participants responded to the question, "To what extent do you think your attitudes toward [e.g., marriage] are driven by your emotions?" ( $M = 7.32$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ). To measure cognitive meta-bases, participants responded to the question, "To what extent do you think your attitudes toward [e.g., marriage] are driven by your beliefs?" ( $M = 7.85$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ). Participants also reported on their perceptions of *their partner's* meta-bases for each of these same attitudes. To measure perceived affective meta-bases for partner, participants were asked, "To what extent do you think your partner's attitudes toward [e.g., marriage] are driven by their emotions?" ( $M = 7.85$ ,

$SD = 2.01$ ). To measure perceived partner cognitive meta-bases, participants were asked, "To what extent do you think your partner's attitudes toward [e.g., marriage] are driven by their beliefs?" ( $M = 8.60$ ,  $SD = 1.80$ ).

#### *Meta-bases understanding*

Meta-bases understanding scores were computed by calculating an item-based, within-dyad correlation involving each meta-base for each respective attitude object (i.e., the correlation between participants' perceptions of their partners' affective and cognitive meta-bases and the partners' self-report on those same-specific affective and cognitive meta-bases). We used the Fisher  $r$  to  $z$  transformation, and resulting scores were used in analyses. This couples-based approach has advantages over absolute difference scores as it is better suited to capturing correspondence over a broad range of attributes instead of focusing on specific variables and takes into account not only the magnitude but also the shape of the correlation between variables (see Gonzalez & Griffin, 1999; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Luo & Klohnen, 2005).

#### *Meta-bases similarity*

Both actual and perceived meta-bases similarity scores were also computed in the same way as above. Actual meta-bases similarity scores were operationalized as the correlation between both partners' self-report on

affective and cognitive meta-bases. Perceived meta-bases similarity scores were operationalized as the correlation between a person's self-report and their perceptions of their partner on affective and cognitive meta-bases. These correlations were also subject to Fisher  $r$  to transformations, and these similarity measures, along with relationship duration, were used as control variables in analyses.

## Results

We used SPSS MIXED to conduct multilevel modeling to examine the effect of meta-bases understanding on relationship quality. This statistical approach allowed us to address the nonindependence of data presented by participating couples (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). The actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) was used to assess the contributions of both partners' understanding scores on their own and partner's relationship quality measures. APIM can examine the extent to which a person's own attributes predict his or her own responses and behaviors (actor effect). It can also examine the extent to which the partner's attributes predict the actor's responses and behaviors (partner effect), controlling for each other. For example, an *actor* effect for understanding would indicate that an individual's understanding of his or her partner's meta-bases predicted his or her own relationship quality, controlling for his or her partner's level of understanding. A partner effect for understanding would indicate that the partner's understanding of the actor's meta-bases predicted the actor's relationship quality, controlling for the actor's level of understanding. Separate models were estimated for each of the subscales of relationship quality.

Consistent with our hypothesis, results revealed significant partner effects (see Table 1). Specifically, meta-bases understanding of one's attitudes by one's partner was significantly associated with greater satisfaction ( $b = 0.64$ ,  $t = 2.29$ ,  $p = .03$ ), greater commitment ( $b = 0.70$ ,  $t = 3.03$ ,  $p = .003$ ), greater love ( $b = 0.46$ ,  $t = 2.02$ ,  $p = .05$ ), greater trust ( $b = 0.65$ ,  $t = 2.01$ ,  $p = .03$ ), greater intimacy ( $b = 0.49$ ,  $t = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ), and greater overall relationship

quality ( $b = 0.43$ ,  $t = 2.12$ ,  $p = .04$ ). There was also a significant actor effect on closeness, ( $b = 1.09$ ,  $t = 2.61$ ,  $p = .01$ ). These significant effects remain controlling for relationship duration, except for trust ( $b = 0.51$ ,  $t = 1.45$ ,  $p = .15$ ) and closeness ( $b = 1.00$ ,  $t = 1.94$ ,  $p = .056$ ). Thus, the more one's partner understood the target's meta-bases, the more the target reported generally greater relationship quality. Furthermore, there were no actor or partner interactions with participant gender, suggesting that these results were comparable for both men and women.

Furthermore, to test the robustness of the expected positive association between partner understanding of meta-bases and relationship quality, we controlled for actual similarity in meta-bases and perceived similarity in meta-bases between couple members, because these two variables are usually examined in tandem with understanding in close relationships. We thus conducted analyses that controlled for meta-bases similarity in the association between meta-bases understanding and relationship quality. The correlation between meta-bases understanding and actual similarity was  $r = .18$ ,  $p = .07$ . The correlation between meta-bases understanding and perceived similarity was  $r = .25$ ,  $p = .01$ . All significant associations reported above remained significant controlling for both actual and perceived meta-bases similarity except for love. Specifically, partner understanding of meta-bases was significantly associated with greater satisfaction ( $b = 0.64$ ,  $t = 2.14$ ,  $p = .04$ ), greater commitment ( $b = 0.63$ ,  $t = 2.61$ ,  $p = .01$ ), greater intimacy ( $b = 0.64$ ,  $t = 2.47$ ,  $p = .02$ ), greater trust ( $b = 0.70$ ,  $t = 2.35$ ,  $p = .02$ ), greater closeness ( $b = 1.21$ ,  $t = 2.70$ ,  $p = .01$ ), and greater overall relationship quality ( $b = 0.48$ ,  $t = 2.24$ ,  $p = .03$ ). In addition, it was marginally associated with greater love ( $b = 0.47$ ,  $t = 1.92$ ,  $p = .06$ ). Moreover, neither actual nor perceived meta-bases similarity predicted relationship quality.

## Discussion

Romantic partners who know each other well generally report having higher quality relationships (e.g., Fletcher & Kerr, 2010;



Swann, Hixon, et al., 1992). This study extends the current literature by moving beyond knowledge of attitudes, traits, or attributes. Instead, we examined a facet of partner knowledge that was related to information-processing goals and was previously unexplored—one that we hypothesized may play an important role in relationship functioning. Because meta-bases are individuals' own subjective beliefs about whether their attitudes are based primarily on affect or cognition, these beliefs can be explicitly communicated to and perceived by a romantic partner over the course of a relationship (Reis & Shaver, 1998). Indeed, in this study, partners' perceptions of one's meta-bases did correspond significantly with one's own meta-bases. Furthermore, by examining associations between meta-bases understanding and relationship quality, we found that a partner's understanding of an actor's own meta-bases was positively and significantly associated with greater satisfaction, commitment, love, trust, intimacy, and overall relationship quality for the actor. Thus, in contrast to findings that suggest that accurate knowledge is not associated with relationship quality (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009), our findings support the notion that there are aspects of attitudes, specifically meta-bases, where accurate knowledge is associated with quality.

Furthermore, we found that meta-bases understanding was not simply a proxy for relationship length or closeness, as these factors were controlled for in our analyses. Crucially, within the specific context of meta-bases, our findings also show that meta-bases understanding predicted relationship quality independent of both actual and perceived meta-bases similarity. Moreover, both actual and perceived meta-bases similarity were not significantly associated with relationship quality. In terms of actual similarity, it is reasonable to assume that having similar meta-bases does not always translate into having accurate knowledge. Furthermore, in terms of perceived similarity, the obtained partner effects go beyond relationship quality being contingent simply on the perception that one has similar processing goals as one's partner. Rather, the data suggest that one's relationship quality is enhanced

when the partner has accurate knowledge. These findings recognize the importance of understanding meta-bases and, more generally, that understanding is key to long-lasting and satisfying relationships (Acitelli et al., 2001).

We did not find significant partner effects on the distinct relationship quality components of passion and romance. Passion is associated with intense emotional and physical arousal between couples (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Sternberg, 1986), whereas romance is associated with the expression of passion in the relationship (Fletcher et al., 2000). Given that passion and romance are associated with intense expressions of union between partners and are not always stable in nature, it is perhaps not surprising that understanding of meta-bases is not predictive of these components.

Actor effects on understanding did not predict relationship quality, with the exception of closeness. This finding mirrors past research showing that understanding one's partner is associated with feelings of control and predictability (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, et al., 1992). Nevertheless, the weak actor effects on understanding is consistent with past research that has suggested that being understood by one's partner is more predictive of relationship quality than understanding one's partner (Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007; Reis & Shaver, 1998). It is possible that actors are not cognizant that their knowledge of their partner's meta-bases could be beneficial in fostering more positive relational interactions. For example, actor understanding can help make partners more predictable, facilitate daily behaviors (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, et al., 1992), and foster partners' goal pursuits (Righetti et al., 2010). Our dependent measures did not directly assess these aspects of relationship functioning, opening a direction for future research.

Past research has demonstrated that relationships in which partners accurately recognize each other's specific traits are associated with relationship well-being (Neff & Karney, 2005). This research is not only consistent with this finding but also extends it to new specific knowledge about one's partner. Accurately perceiving and understanding how

one's partner's attitudes are driven constitutes a specific form of knowledge (i.e., partner processing goals) that can play a central role in interpersonal functioning. Partners who are more familiar with how each other's attitudes are driven should be more adept in their interactions with each other as well as better at influencing one another. Moreover, understanding partners' meta-bases on relationship-relevant attitudes can help couples achieve "pragmatic accuracy," which is accuracy that facilitates relationship functioning (Gill & Swann, 2004). Understanding might also play a crucial role in facilitating goal pursuit and accomplishment by providing support that corresponds to their partner's meta-bases, for example, in terms of partner affirmation with regard to the Michelangelo phenomenon (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). This can increase perceived partner responsiveness, or the perception that one is understood, validated, and cared for (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1998). Perceiving your partner as more responsive might be a plausible mediator in the association between partner understanding of one's own meta-bases and one's own relationship quality. Further research could examine perceived responsiveness as a mediator, with implications for our understanding of what it means to have a partner who is understanding and perceived to be responsive.

As with any study, our study has limitations. First, our sample size was small and this might have reduced the power to detect significant associations. Also, we examined only college students in this study. Hence, future research involving larger and more diverse samples would offer greater insights on meta-base understanding and relationship quality. Next, due to the cross-sectional and correlational nature of the study, we cannot make causal conclusions about the associations between meta-bases understanding and relationship quality. It is possible that relationships high in quality influence partners to be more understanding of how each other's attitudes are driven. Moreover, there could be a bidirectional influence between meta-bases understanding and relationship quality. Future research could examine these

issues longitudinally to help tease apart causality. Furthermore, our outcome variables were measures of relationship quality and, as such, were evaluative in nature and did not directly assess behaviors enacted within a given relationship. Future research might focus on associations between meta-bases understanding and relationship maintenance behaviors, such as provision of social support or forgiveness. In addition, future research might attempt to extend the generalizability of meta-bases understanding to attitude objects or issues not measured in this study.

The findings of this study might also extend to the purposeful regulation of romantic partners by involved intimates. For example, in order to resolve a disagreement, an actor might make use of persuasive appeals that match the meta-bases of their partner. One could envisage a study in which couples come to a laboratory to engage in a conflict resolution task. Statements made during the task could be coded to determine whether matching appeals with a partner's preferred meta-bases predicts greater conflict resolution. Furthermore, we do not need to confine our analysis to just romantic relationships. It is possible (and likely) that meta-bases understanding is important in friendships, parent-child relationships, and organizational contexts as well, with more accurate interpersonal perception also aiding in regulation processes within these types of relationships.

From an interdependence perspective (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), couples engage in acts of persuasion and influence that bring about attitudinal change and convergence within romantic partnerships, a process that has been called "attitude alignment" (Davis & Rusbult, 2001). On the one hand, couples engage in attitude alignment either to gain acceptance by their partner (normative social influence) or because the partner is right (informational social influence). On the other hand, a partner might deliberately engage in persuasive appeals to bring about desired attitude change. A considerable body of research has shown message-matching effects such that affective messages are more successful at changing affective rather than cognitive attitudes and vice versa, with the implication

being that the match between the message focus and attitude is more effective for persuasion (Fabrigar & Petty, 1999; Huskinson & Haddock, 2004, but see also Millar & Millar, 1990; See, Valenti, Ho, & Tan, 2013). Importantly, following prior research (e.g., See et al., 2008), we construed meta-bases at the individual differences level in this study. That is, we examined partner's understanding of meta-bases across a variety of attitude objects. Thus, we expect that similar findings will emerge for attitudes in other domains, with important implications for persuasion as well as for consequential behaviors (including health-related actions, such as smoking cessation and condom use).

Despite limitations of this research, our results show that understanding partner characteristics such as meta-bases are a significant predictor of relationship quality. Conversely, the lack of accurate knowledge or deviations between a person's self-description and his or her partner's perceptions may be a potential source of conflict, leading to problems or misunderstandings and, in turn, to lower relationship quality. These findings have implications for the potential role of persuasive attempts on relationship quality and generate new predictions about the effects of message tailoring on perceptions of relationship quality. We hope these findings encourage further research to illuminate how partner understanding of meta-bases can influence relationship dynamics.

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