



Barriers to Participating in Self-Expanding Relationship Activities and the Role of Growth and Destiny Beliefs

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Abstract

New and exciting activities with a partner have been linked to a variety of benefits for intimate relationships; however, less is known about what hinders these activities. The goal of the present research was to examine the barriers that people face when planning shared new and exciting (i.e., self-expanding) relationship activities with their intimate partner and whether some people have traits (i.e., destiny and growth beliefs) that promote persistence in the face of these barriers. Across two studies, participants in intimate relationships reflected on barriers associated with participating in self-expanding activities that they planned with their partner in the past and identified the frequency of these barriers in the past six months (Study 1), and then rated the extent to which barriers interfered with their ability to carry out the activities (Study 1 and 2). In Study 2, participants completed measures of destiny and growth beliefs, and identified their level of enjoyment and desire to participate in similar self-expanding activities in the future. In both studies, we found that participants rated finances, limited resources, and obligations as barriers that interfered the most with activities. Our findings suggest that barriers were more likely to interfere with activities for people higher in destiny beliefs (vs. growth beliefs). Growth beliefs were significantly associated with greater enjoyment from self-expanding activities and a greater likelihood of participating in similar activities in the future (vs. destiny beliefs). Our findings have implications for understanding barriers that couples face when engaging in self-expanding activities in their intimate relationships.

Keywords

self-expansion, shared activities, romantic relationships, growth and destiny beliefs



Maintaining passion in intimate relationships beyond the “honeymoon phase” can be difficult for couples (see [Carswell & Impett, 2021](#) for a review). One strategy for fostering passion in established relationships is by participating in shared new and exciting activities together (see [Aron et al., 2013](#) for a review). Clinician accounts and self-help books have pointed towards the benefits of couples trying new and exciting activities for decades (e.g., [Gottman et al., 2019](#)). Specifically, new and exciting activities are often described in the context of relationship maintenance, including as a mechanism of relieving relational boredom (i.e., [Harasymchuk & Fehr, 2010](#)). Further, the self-expansion model suggests that people have a fundamental motivation to acquire new experiences and resources via their relationships ([Aron & Aron, 1986, 1996](#); see [Aron et al., 2013](#) for a review). Thus, growing evidence highlights the benefits of shared new and exciting activities in promoting a broadened perspective of the self and world (i.e., self-expansion, [Aron et al., 2000](#)), relationship quality, closeness, and sexual desire (e.g., [Coulter & Malouff, 2013](#); [Muise et al., 2019](#)). However, [Harasymchuk and colleagues \(2017\)](#) investigated how people respond to relational boredom within the context of novel versus familiar activities; they found that when faced with relational boredom, people *think* they should engage in more exciting activities with their partner, though they ultimately disengage from familiar, comforting, and pleasant activities with their partner. This suggests that people have prescriptive and descriptive beliefs when it comes to self-expanding activities. However, some couples might not engage in enough new and exciting activities to keep them satisfied, even when they might need it the most ([Harasymchuk et al., 2017](#)). The question, then, is why do couples not engage in shared new and exciting activities despite knowing their potential benefits? The goal of the present research was to examine the types of barriers that people face when planning and participating in shared new and exciting (i.e., self-expanding) relationship activities with their intimate partner, and to assess whether people with certain traits (i.e., growth and destiny beliefs) are more likely to persist in the face of these barriers.

Self-Expansion Model

According to the self-expansion model, people are motivated to develop new perspectives, identities, and resources that increase their personal self-efficacy, and a primary way of doing this is within the context of one’s intimate relationship ([Aron & Aron, 1986](#); [Aron et al., 2013](#)). At the beginning of intimate relationships, couples self-expand at a rapid rate as they learn new information and gain resources from their partner and integrate this information into their own sense of self ([Aron et al., 2004](#); [Strong & Aron, 2006](#)). However, opportunities for self-expansion tend to decrease over the course of the relationship ([Aron et al., 2004](#)). One way of achieving ongoing self-expansion as the relationship progresses is through participating in shared novel and exciting activities with one’s partner ([Aron et al., 2013](#)). Participating in activities with a partner that are perceived as novel and exciting is associated with increased relational self-expansion

(Harasymchuk et al., 2020, 2021) and enhanced relationship quality and romantic attraction (Aron et al., 2000; Coulter & Malouff, 2013; Graham, 2008; Lewandowski & Aron, 2004; Muise et al., 2019; Reissman et al., 1993). Generally, research has defined these activities in a variety of ways including arousing and novel (commonly referred to as exciting; Aron et al., 2000, Aron et al., 2013; Malouff et al., 2012), and have been examined in both lab settings (Aron et al., 2000) and in the context of couples' daily lives (Harasymchuk et al., 2020). People know that when they are bored in their relationship, they should engage in novel and exciting (i.e., self-expanding) activities to "spice up" their relationship (Harasymchuk et al., 2017); however, couples might face barriers that prevent them from following through with these self-expanding activities in practice.

Although there is a wealth of evidence supporting the beneficial effects of engaging in self-expanding activities, less is known about what hinders couples' engagement in these activities. Researchers have suggested that people may face barriers when participating in shared activities, particularly when couples feel that they are not in agreement about the purpose of engaging in the activity or when perceived partner support is low (Baldwin et al., 1999; Crawford et al., 2002). In line with this, Graham and Harf (2015) found that when couples encountered barriers that exceeded their abilities and resources when approaching self-expanding activities (e.g., their level of competency does not match the level of challenge), their desire to participate in future self-expanding activities, and the overall benefits of self-expanding activities, decreased. Additionally, intrapersonal factors such as low motivation and low self-concept clarity may interfere with engagement in self-expanding activities (Emery et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2020). Thus, there is some evidence that couples experience barriers to participating in self-expanding activities; however, less is known about the nature of the barriers that might impede participation.

Growth and Destiny Beliefs

In addition to understanding the types of barriers that people face, it is also critical to understand individual differences in how people respond. People differ in how they respond to barriers in relationships (Apostolou & Wang, 2020; Overall et al., 2009), including how they manage planning self-expanding activities. One way that people differ in their perception of barriers is whether they view them as being associated with further growth (i.e., something to be overcome) or as something that interferes and is destined to be negative (i.e., a significant hindrance). For example, people high (vs. low) in approach relationship goals (i.e., a focus on positivity, growth, and intimacy) are more likely to plan and engage in self-expanding activities (Harasymchuk et al., 2020, 2021). Similarly, implicit theories involve beliefs surrounding either relationship *growth* or relationship *destiny*, and influence people's goals, motivations, attributions, and behaviours in the context of their intimate relationships (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2003). People higher in growth beliefs are more likely to view barriers in the relationship as something to be

overcome, whereas those higher in destiny beliefs are more likely to view barriers as being a cue that the relationship is not compatible. Similarly, people higher in growth beliefs are more likely to focus on ways of improving and achieving growth in their relationship, whereas people higher in destiny beliefs are more likely to focus on signals of malcontent within relationships, often focusing on the negative factors associated with their partner and relationship (Knee et al., 2003).

Growth beliefs are associated with more attempts to engage in activities focused on maintaining and cultivating the relationship, whereas destiny beliefs are associated with the view of barriers as an indicator of relationship distress, leading to disengagement from the relationship (Knee et al., 2003; Mattingly et al., 2019). People higher in growth beliefs (vs. higher in destiny beliefs) are theorized to engage in relationship maintenance processes (including opportunities for self-expansion). Thus, it is possible that when couples face barriers before they even engage in the activity, people high in growth beliefs (vs. people high in destiny beliefs) might be more likely to overcome them and persist in the activity (i.e., find ways of adapting the activity so that they may still participate) and, subsequently, reap relationship benefits (Mattingly et al., 2019). There are fewer findings to suggest the impact of destiny beliefs on self-expansion. Mattingly and colleagues (2019) examined the mediating role of self-expansion in the relation between implicit theories of relationships (growth and destiny beliefs) and relationship maintenance behaviours and cognitions (accommodation and dissolution consideration). Expanding on these findings, the goal of the present research was to examine some of the day-to-day reasons why people might have difficulty engaging in activities that promote self-expansion (i.e., new and exciting activities). Namely, we sought to examine the barriers that people face when planning to engage in self-expanding activities with their partner, whether implicit beliefs play a role in how people experience barriers, and how this impacts their likelihood of participating in future self-expanding activities.

Overview and Hypotheses

The purpose of the current research was to examine the most common barriers that people face when planning self-expanding activities with their partners, and to explore individual differences in how people navigate them. To assess our research questions, in Study 1, we explored the extent to which a variety of barriers interfered with past self-expanding activities that participants had planned with their partners, and the frequency that they had experienced these in the last six months. In Study 2, participants reflected on a specific self-expanding date that they planned with their partner and indicated the extent to which barriers interfered with this specific activity. We investigated whether growth and destiny beliefs were associated with the extent to which barriers interfered when reflecting on the self-expanding activity that they planned with their partner, as well as with enjoyment of the date and desire to participate in similar novel and exciting (i.e., self-expanding) activities in the future.

Consistent with the idea that people higher in growth beliefs perceive relationships as flourishing through conquering challenges (Knee et al., 2003), we predict that people higher in growth (vs. destiny) beliefs will be more likely to recall experiencing greater enjoyment from the self-expanding activity with their partner and more likely to report a desire to engage in future similar self-expanding activities with their partner. This is in line with research which suggests that people higher in growth beliefs are more likely to approach opportunities for growth in their relationship (i.e., self-expansion), and are more likely to participate in relationship maintenance behaviours and cognitions (Mattingly et al., 2019). We predict that this association will be maintained when controlling for the extent to which barriers interfered with the planning of their date.

Study 1

In Study 1, we explored the barriers people face when planning self-expanding activities with their partners. More specifically, we assessed the extent to which participants recalled specific barriers as interfering with their participation in self-expanding shared activities in the past, and we assessed the relative frequency that these had occurred within the past six months.

Method

Participants

We recruited participants in exclusive intimate relationships to complete an online questionnaire via Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N = 379$). Participants were eligible to participate if they were currently in a geographically-close and exclusive romantic relationship (i.e., no long distance, no casual dating). We excluded data for participants who did not meet the eligibility criteria for the study ($n = 95$), and who demonstrated incomplete or careless responding ($n = 31$). The final sample consisted of 253 participants (48% women, 51% men, 1% non-binary) between the ages of 21 and 71 ($M_{age} = 35$ years, $SD = 10$ years). The average relationship length was 7.20 years ($SD = 7.36$ years). Most participants (80%) identified as White, followed by Black (8.7%) and Asian (7.1%), and 4.8% reported that their race/ethnicity was not listed.

Procedure

In a previous pilot study conducted via Amazon Mechanical Turk, we asked participants in exclusive romantic relationships ($N = 174$; 51% women; $M_{age} = 30$ years; who had been with their partner for an average of 6.35 years) to describe up to five barriers that they experienced when trying new things with their partner in the past. Researchers coded these barriers and, in conjunction with insights from the literature, developed a final list of common barriers for the current study (see list of barriers in Table 1).

Table 1*Ratings of Barriers When Planning Self-Expanding Activities, Study 1 and 2*

Variable	Study 1			Study 2
	Frequency of Occurrence (in past six months)	Ranked as Top Three Barriers	Extent of Interference	Extent of Interference
	<i>M (SD)</i>	%	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Finances	4.78 (2.58)	66.9	5.34 (2.24)	4.55 (2.24)
Limited Resources	4.32 (2.34)	60.8	4.98 (2.01)	4.25 (2.20)
Obligations	4.22 (2.33)	50.8	5.05 (2.07)	4.22 (2.32)
Thinking of a New Activity	2.94 (1.95)	25.8	3.90 (2.23)	4.00 (2.28)
Health Barriers	2.50 (2.25)	11.5	2.74 (2.16)	2.80 (2.22)
Lack of Interest	2.95 (2.24)	10.8	3.28 (2.16)	3.36 (2.12)
Distance Barriers	2.52 (2.17)	8.8	2.74 (2.10)	3.35 (2.33)
Personality Differences	2.75 (2.05)	8.5	3.41 (2.29)	—
Negative Emotions Towards Partner	2.50 (2.02)	6.5	2.85 (2.13)	—
Other Barriers	2.53 (2.43)	6.2	2.40 (2.43)	3.11 (2.60)
Inability to Finalize Plan	2.88 (2.06)	5.8	3.51 (2.13)	3.71 (2.23)
Fear/Nerves about Impact on Relationship	2.26 (1.95)	4.6	2.52 (2.01)	3.11 (2.33)
Worry about Engaging in Activity	2.37 (2.01)	3.8	2.71 (2.15)	—
Lack of Skill Required	2.37 (2.04)	3.1	2.83 (1.95)	3.33 (2.13)

Note. A dash indicates that this barrier was not assessed in Study 2 due to an amalgamation of categories. ‘Extent of Interference’ refers to extent of barriers experienced when planning self-expanding activities in general (Study 1) and for a specific date (Study 2). Ratings were made on a 7-point scale.

Participants were provided with the following instructions: “*Research has suggested that participating in new and exciting activities with your partner can lead to many benefits for your relationship; however, many couples face a number of obstacles when planning and preparing to engage in such activities. The following section will ask you about your experiences with some of these obstacles.*” Participants then rated the extent to which each barrier interfered when planning self-expanding (i.e., new and exciting) activities in the past (7-point Likert scale 1 = *Not at all an obstacle* to 7 = *Very much an obstacle*). Then, participants indicated the frequency that these barriers occurred for them when planning self-expanding activities with their partner in the last six months (7-point Likert scale 1 = *Never* to 7 = *Very often*). Finally, participants ranked the top three barriers based on those which were the most challenging when planning self-expanding activities in the past.

Results

We found that finances (e.g., on a budget, activity was too expensive), limited resources (e.g., time and energy), and obligations (e.g., family, friends, and work getting in the way)

emerged as the three most interfering and frequent barriers that people experienced when planning self-expanding activities with their partner (see Table 1).

Findings from repeated measures ANOVA suggested significant differences between barriers on the extent to which they were rated as interfering, $F(1, 13) = 31.61, p < .01$. Similarly, repeated measures ANOVA suggested significant differences between barriers on their frequency of occurring, $F(1, 13) = 31.62, p < .01$. Pairwise comparisons demonstrated that Limited Resources, Finances, and Obligations were rated as interfering and occurring significantly more often compared to other barriers.

Study 2

In Study 1, we examined the extent to which a variety of barriers occurred when planning self-expanding relationship activities with a partner, and the extent to which these barriers interfered with activities occurring in the past six months. In Study 2, we wanted to extend this analysis to the recollection of a specific date that was planned with the partner, and to examine the role of growth and destiny beliefs. Participants reflected on a specific self-expanding date that they planned with their partner in the past and indicated the extent to which barriers interfered with this specific activity. Additionally, we measured growth and destiny beliefs, and participants rated their enjoyment of the date and desire to participate in similar self-expanding activities in the future.

Method

Participants

We recruited participants in exclusive intimate relationships via Amazon Mechanical Turk ($N = 456$). Mirroring Study 1, participants were eligible to participate if they were currently in a geographically-close and exclusive romantic relationship. We excluded data from analyses for participants who did not meet the eligibility criteria (i.e., single, casually dating, in a long-distance relationship; $n = 93$), and who demonstrated careless and incomplete responding (e.g., did not fully complete the survey, failed attention checks; $n = 135$). The final sample consisted of 228 participants (49% women, 51% men), ranging in age from 20 to 67 years old ($M_{age} = 35$ years; $SD = 11$ years). The average relationship length was 6 years ($SD = 7.44$ years). Most participants identified as White (69%), followed by Black (16%), Asian (9%), and 6.2% identified that their race/ethnicity was not listed.

Procedure

We first asked participants to recall one self-expanding activity that they planned with their partner and describe it (we did not specify a timeline for when this activity occurred; we used the recalled date to prompt participants during the remaining questions).

Participants were prompted with the following instructions: “*We are interested in new and exciting activities that you and your partner have planned with one another (i.e., trying new things). These activities can be anything that was new or unfamiliar to you, to your partner, or to both of you. These activities can be things that you and your partner have planned recently, or in the past. Using the space below, please describe ONE of the new and exciting dates that you and your partner have planned in the past. Remember, we are interested in what you think is new and exciting.*”

Next, we presented participants with the list of barriers (e.g., finances, limited resources, obligations) adapted from Study 1. To further reduce participants’ load for rating various categories of barriers and to reduce repetition, we combined similar and overlapping categories used in Study 1, reducing the list to 10 unique barriers. Specifically, the *personality differences* category was incorporated in the *lack of interest in the activity* category because we found in the pilot research that people often referenced the idea that they ‘lack interest in what their partner likes’ for the *personality differences* category. Additionally, we integrated the *worry about engagement in the activity* and *negative emotions towards partner* categories into the *fear/nerves about the impact on the relationship* category because they all related to negative emotions and concerns about the impact on the relationship. Participants indicated the extent to which the barriers interfered with their ability to participate in their recalled planned date activity (7-point Likert scale from 1 = *Not at all* to 7 = *Very much so*). New to Study 2, participants indicated whether they had followed through with the planned date that they recalled (*Yes* or *No*). (Although we assumed that most participants would recall a date with which they had followed through, we explored whether some participants might recall a time where barriers prevented them from participating in their self-expanding activity.) Then, participants who indicated following through with their date indicated how much they enjoyed participating in the date (using a star rating scale of 1 to 5 stars, where 5 represented “very much enjoyed”), and their desire to participate in similar novel and exciting (i.e., self-expanding) activities with their partner in the future (7-point Likert scale from 1 = *Not at all/Never* to 7 = *Very much so/Definitely again in the future*).

Finally, we assessed individual differences in growth and destiny beliefs using the Implicit Theories of Relationships measure (Knee et al., 2003), whereby participants responded to items on a 7-point Likert scale from (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). The growth beliefs scale consisted of eleven items ($\alpha = .80$) including: “*The ideal relationship develops gradually over time*”, and “*Challenges and obstacles in a relationship can make love even stronger*”. The destiny beliefs subscale consisted of 11 items ($\alpha = .92$) including: “*Potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not*”, and “*To last, a relationship must seem right from the start*”. Scores on both growth and destiny beliefs were obtained through calculating an average of items on each respective subscale (Knee et al., 2003).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables can be found in Table 2. Consistent with Study 1, participants in Study 2 rated finances, limited resources, and obligations as the top three barriers that interfered when planning self-expanding activities with their partner (see Table 1). Most participants (89%) recalled a planned self-expanding date that they followed through with and, thus, we had a sufficient sample size to proceed with the analyses. Of note, there were no significant differences between those who did versus did not follow through with the self-expanding date on any of the observed variables. There were no effects of growth nor destiny beliefs on whether participants reported following through with the date, $t(226) = 1.27, p = .24$; $t(226) = 0.40, p = .69$. The extent to which barriers interfered with planning the date was negatively and significantly correlated with the enjoyment of the date (Table 2), suggesting that when participants perceived barriers as interfering with planning the self-expanding activity, their overall enjoyment of the activity was lower. However, we found that the extent to which barriers interfered was also positively and significantly correlated with desire to participate in future similar activities, suggesting that partners still reported a desire to participate in their self-expanding activity in the future despite experiencing barriers (Table 2). We also conducted partial correlations for study variables to control for both growth and destiny beliefs, respectively (Table 3).

Table 2

Correlations for Study 2

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Growth Beliefs	5.31 (0.73)	—				
2. Destiny Beliefs	4.36 (1.20)	.01	—			
3. Extent Barriers Interfered with Activity	3.71 (1.95)	.13	.39**	—		
4. Enjoyment of Activity	4.49 (0.71)	.10	-.00	-.16*	—	
5. Desire to Participate in Future Similar Activities	6.17 (1.17)	.18**	-.13	.22**	.40**	—

Note. Only those who reported that they followed through with their date ($n = 201$) were asked about enjoyment and desire to participate in the activity again in the future. All measures were scored through calculating the mean of respective items. All measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale, with exception of *Enjoyment of Activity*, which was rated on a 5-point scale.

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

Table 3*Partial Correlations for Study 2, Controlling for Growth and Destiny Beliefs*

Variable	1	2	3	4
Controlling for Growth Beliefs				
1. Destiny Beliefs	—			
2. Extent Barriers Interfered with Activity	.46**	—		
3. Enjoyment of Activity	-.01	-.17*	—	
4. Desire to Participate in Future Similar Activities	.05	-.11	.36**	—
Controlling for Destiny Beliefs				
1. Growth Beliefs	—			
2. Extent Barriers Interfered with Activity	.18**	—		
3. Enjoyment of Activity	.10	-.16*	—	
4. Desire to Participate in Future Similar Activities	.20**	-.11	.37**	—

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

We conducted a simultaneous regression analysis to assess our hypothesis that people who are higher in growth (vs. destiny) beliefs would report experiencing greater enjoyment from their date even when controlling for the extent to which barriers interfered. That is, we were interested in how implicit beliefs related to enjoyment of self-expanding activities when controlling for the barriers that they faced (i.e., it is possible that some people might have experienced fewer or greater barriers, which might have impacted activity outcomes). This hypothesis was partially supported, with our results suggesting that when controlling for the extent to which barriers interfered with planning, people higher in growth beliefs, $\beta = 0.12$, $t(203) = 1.76$, $p = .06$, experienced higher enjoyment from the self-expanding dates that they recalled, whereas people higher in destiny beliefs did not demonstrate a significant association with enjoyment, $\beta = 0.09$, $t(203) = 1.18$, $p = .27$; $F(3, 200) = 3.35$, $p = .02$. This relation was not significantly stronger for growth beliefs compared to destiny beliefs ($z = 1.00$, $p = 0.16$). Also, in line with our hypothesis, we found that people higher in growth beliefs were more likely to report a desire to engage in similar self-expanding activities in the future when controlling for the extent to which barriers interfered, $\beta = .20$, $t(205) = 2.79$, $p < .01$, compared to those higher in destiny beliefs, $\beta = .11$, $t(205) = 1.48$, $p = .14$; $F(3, 202) = 3.32$, $p = .02$. To further support this hypothesis, we found a significant relation between growth beliefs and the desire to participate in similar self-expanding activities in the future (Table 2). This relation was significantly stronger for growth beliefs compared to destiny beliefs ($z = 3.11$, $p < .01$).

As predicted, we found that people higher in destiny beliefs (vs. growth beliefs) were more likely to report that barriers interfered with their ability to follow through with the self-expanding activity beyond the planning stages, $\beta = .58$, $t(227) = 5.90$, $p < .01$. We also found a significant association for growth beliefs, $\beta = .31$, $t(227) = 2.01$,

$p = .046$, $F(2, 225) = 19.54$, $p < .01$; however, the association between destiny beliefs and the extent to which barriers interfered with the date was significantly stronger ($z = -2.87$, $p < .01$). Of note, all associations remained constant when controlling for age, gender, and relationship length.

General Discussion

The current research focused on barriers associated with a specific type of relationship maintenance strategy, namely participating in self-expanding (i.e., novel and exciting) activities with an intimate partner. Across two studies, we examined the barriers that people face when planning self-expanding shared activities with their partners and identified individual differences in growth and destiny beliefs that may help or hinder some people to overcome these barriers.

Barriers to Participating in Self-Expanding Activities

Researchers have found that marital dissatisfaction and ‘growing apart’ is associated with a lack of effort, communication issues, conflicts of values, and long working hours (Amato & Previti, 2003; Apostolou & Wang, 2020). Another reason is a lack of growth, or rather, lack of self-expansion (see Aron et al., 2013 for a review). In the current study, we sought to examine the types of barriers that couples face when attempting to plan self-expanding activities with their partner to promote relationship growth. In other words, what gets in the way of people trying to pursue growth and self-expansion in their intimate relationship?

Our findings suggest that contextual factors such as finances, limited resources, and obligations are the most common and interfering barriers that couples experience when planning self-expanding activities. In contrast, barriers such as a lack of skill or inability to finalize a plan were less interfering for couples. Additionally, our findings suggest that the more that couples perceive barriers as interfering with their activity, the less enjoyment they report experiencing from the activity. This is in contrast with Graham’s (2008) findings that suggest challenges in self-expanding activities (to a point where they meet the abilities of the couple) can increase enjoyment in the activity. This research extends our limited knowledge relating to general barriers that predict relationship dissolution (e.g., conflict, infidelity; DeMaris, 2000; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Kurdek, 2002; Orbuch et al., 2002), to include factors that inhibit growth in the context of romantic relationships. Additionally, recent evidence has suggested that some people may prefer activities that conserve the sense of self (i.e., that are familiar and comfortable, rather than new and exciting; Hughes et al., 2020), which may further interfere with participation in self-expanding activities. These barriers are a reality for most intimate partnerships, and can often be conquerable (i.e., developing ways of over-

coming barriers, such as planning for childcare, finding an alternative, low-cost, activity). However, it is possible for barriers to fall outside of the couples' control. For example, lower income couples may not have the same access to resources or control over certain barriers when compared to higher income couples (Karney & Bradbury, 2020), and these types of external factors may also shape the planning process.

The Role of Growth and Destiny Beliefs

When considering individual differences, recent research suggests that self-expansion may mediate the relation between growth (but not destiny) beliefs and positive relationship outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, commitment; Mattingly et al., 2019). We found that people higher in destiny beliefs reported that barriers interfered more with their ability to follow-through with their recalled self-expanding activity. This finding is in line with research which suggests that destiny beliefs are associated with withdrawal in the face of relationship threats or challenges (Knee et al., 2003). Similarly, Mattingly and colleagues (2019) suggested that those higher in destiny beliefs are less likely to seek self-expansion opportunities and may be more sensitive to potential for rejection amid self-expansion (e.g., failure of the activity given barriers). Notably, and in line with our hypotheses, people experienced barriers when planning self-expanding activities, though those higher in growth beliefs expressed significantly higher enjoyment and desire to participate in similar self-expanding activities in the future compared to people higher in destiny beliefs. Together, these findings suggest that even when experiencing barriers in the context of self-expanding activities, people higher in growth beliefs are more likely to report a desire to foster opportunities for self-expansion in the future. These results are in line with known characteristics of destiny beliefs, whereby people higher in destiny beliefs are more likely to withdraw and experience negative reactions when facing conflict (Knee et al., 2003).

Our findings build upon recent research suggesting that some people are more skilled at planning and following through with self-expanding dates compared to others (Harasymchuk et al., 2021). Namely, evidence suggests that people higher in approach relationship goals (i.e., those motivated by goals focused on growth) derived greater closeness from self-expanding dates compared to those lower in approach relationship goals and those higher in avoidance relationship goals (i.e., those motivated by avoiding negative emotions; Harasymchuk et al., 2021). These findings relate to our current exploration of barriers and growth beliefs in self-expanding activities, whereby we found that people who perceive barriers to self-expanding dates as being unchanging, negative experiences (i.e., destiny beliefs) were more likely to abandon shared activities. In contrast, people who saw these barriers to self-expanding dates as something to be overcome and grow from (i.e., growth beliefs) were more likely to express a desire to participate in similar self-activities in the future. As the link between approach relationship goals, growth beliefs, and self-expansion emerges (e.g., Mattingly et al., 2019), the common

factors of growth-seeking and approach behaviors present an interesting perspective in our understanding of factors that influence engagement in self-expanding activities.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current research expands our understanding of barriers that people face when engaging in self-expanding shared activities with their partner, and factors that enable some people to overcome these and persist in self-expanding activities (i.e., growth vs. destiny beliefs). Despite these novel contributions to the literature, we acknowledge some notable limitations.

First, participants were asked to reflect on a date that they engaged in during their past, and this assessment allows for retrospective bias that could impact memories associated with the shared activity. For example, asking participants to reflect on previous shared activities may bias responses in favor of activities where couples followed through (versus those which they 'gave up on'). Similarly, retrospective bias can influence perceptions of enjoyment, whereby delayed assessments of mood are inaccurately skewed towards a more negative impression compared to ratings that are gathered in-the-moment (Baumeister et al., 2001). Future research could assess the barriers closer to the point in time the planning and activity occurred (i.e., immediately after or on the same day). Second, we must acknowledge the limitations in the generalizability of our sample that consisted mostly of a White population of a relatively young age. Future research would benefit from assessing differences in barriers from a more diverse population of couples across the lifespan. Finally, in the present research we did not assess whether couples with lower (versus higher) socioeconomic status reported finances or overall access to resources to be a more frequent challenge when planning self-expanding activities together (Karney, 2021). An important consideration for self-expanding activity planning is how couples allocate their resources, especially money (i.e., Cheema & Soman, 2006; Heath & Soll, 1996). Within the context of an intimate couple, the concept of income can become quite nuanced as there are differences in how couples manage the sharing of expenses, which in turn impact their decisions when it comes to planning self-expanding couple activities. A meaningful way to assess differences in socioeconomic status would be through a dyadic study, where measures could be included to assess socioeconomic status at the participant as well as at the couple level (for a review, see Karney, 2021) to further understand how barriers to activity planning may be impacted by these variables. Similarly, it would be of benefit to examine differences between types of barriers in this vein (i.e., resource-based vs. interpersonal) to better understand if there are differential effects on subsequent activity enjoyment and participation.

Conclusion

The current findings demonstrate that people experience a variety of barriers that may affect their engagement in self-expanding shared activities. We found that day-to-day resource- and scheduling-related barriers such as finances, limited resources, and overall obligations may be the most frequent and impactful to overcome when it comes to engaging in new and exciting activities with an intimate partner. Our results also suggest that people higher in destiny beliefs might experience greater difficulty with overcoming such barriers and may consequently have poorer experiences and reap fewer benefits from engaging in self-expanding shared activities. Taken together, our findings suggest that barriers have an impact on participation in and perception of self-expanding activities and should not be discounted when advising couples to integrate more self-expanding activities into their relationship. Further, our growth belief findings suggest that people should be encouraged to embrace barriers as opportunities for increased closeness with their partner, viewing them as a shared experience to overcome rather than an indicator of relationship viability.

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