

Romantic partners influence each other's goals

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Over the long-term, what one partner in a two-person relationship wishes to avoid, so too does the other partner—and what one wants to achieve,

so does the other. These effects can be observed regardless of gender, age and length of the relationship, as researchers from the University of Basel report in a study of more than 450 couples.

The research team from the University of Basel's Faculty of Psychology wanted to examine the short- and long-term interdependence of approach goals and avoidance goals within couples. The participants reported whether they had tried to avoid conflicts or share meaningful experiences with their partner that day. This was followed by an analysis of how the information affected the goals of the partner.

The goals of each person were recorded daily over the course of two 14-day measurement periods at an interval of 10 to 12 months; 456 male-female couples took part. The average age of the participants was just under 34 years old, and the average relationship length was almost 10 years. The study appeared in the latest issue of *The Journal of Gerontology*.

Delayed effects

The study showed that when one person within a couple avoids distress and conflicts, for example, the other tries to do the same. And conversely, when one person seeks [personal growth](#) and meaningful experiences, the other wants to achieve them too. The team of psychologists, led by first author Professor Jana Nikitin, found significant delayed effects between the partners. These appeared regardless of gender, age or relationship length.

It was notable that the daily goals of one partner—which can change—mainly coincided with the medium- and longer-term [goal](#) trends of the other partner. It therefore takes several days to months for the long-term relationship goals of one partner to have an impact on the goals of the other. "This could be an adaptive mechanism to maintain the

stability of the [relationship](#)," says Nikitin, "by not being influenced by every momentary shift made by the partner."

More information: Jana Nikitin et al, Interdependence of Approach and Avoidance Goals in Romantic Couples Over Days and Months, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* (2020). [DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbaa149](https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbaa149)

Provided by University of Basel

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