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On the role of basic human values in romantic relationships

A set of two studies conducted to explore whether, how and why value priorities influence romantic relationship functioning.

Master Thesis

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Abstract

The present research addressed the role of basic human values in understanding romantic relationship functioning, in particular the role of self-transcendence values versus self-enhancement values. In a set of two studies we sought support for the hypothesis that prioritizing self-transcendence values may enhance relationship functioning, whereas prioritizing self-enhancement values may decrease relationship functioning. Moreover, the possible mediating role of partner responsiveness between values and relationship functioning was explored. In Study 1, value priorities were measured using the Portrait Values Questionnaire. In Study 2, a value prime was used to explore whether the relationship between values and relationship functioning is correlational or causal. The results were not conclusive, but nevertheless indicated that value priorities may be associated with relationship functioning. That is, people who prioritized self-enhancement values experienced decreased relationship functioning (Study 1), while people who prioritized self-transcendence values experiences enhanced relationship functioning (Study 2). Furthermore, partner responsiveness mediated the relationship between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning in Study 2, but not in Study 1. In the last section, implications and limitations of the present research and indications for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Value priorities, relationship functioning, partner responsiveness.

Samenvatting

In de huidige studie werd onderzocht wat de rol is van persoonlijke waarden op het functioneren van romantische relaties, in het bijzonder de rol van *self-transcendence* waarden versus *self-enhancement* waarden. Middels een set van twee studies werd de hypothese getest dat mensen die een hoge voorkeur tonen voor *self-transcendence* waarden verbeterd functioneren van hun relatie ervaren, terwijl mensen die een hoge voorkeur tonen voor *self-enhancement* waarden verslechterd functioneren van hun relatie ervaren. Daarbij werd de mogelijk mediërende rol van partner responsiviteit tussen waarden en relatie functioneren onderzocht. In studie 1 werden mensen hun waardenvoorkeuren gemeten met behulp van de Portret Waarden vragenlijst. In studie 2 werd middels een waarden prime onderzocht of de associatie tussen waarden en relatie functioneren correlatieel of causaal is. De resultaten waren niet eenduidig, maar wezen desalniettemin op een relatie tussen waardenvoorkeuren en relatie functioneren. Zo ervoeren mensen met een voorkeur voor *self-enhancement* waarden verslechterd relatie functioneren (Studie 1), terwijl mensen met een voorkeur voor *self-*

transcendence waarden verbeterd relatie functioneren ervoeren. (Studie 2). Verder medieerde partner responsiviteit de relatie tussen *self-transcendence* waarden en relatie functioneren in Studie 2, maar niet in Studie 1. In de discussie is aandacht besteed aan de implicaties en tekortkomingen van het huidige onderzoek en worden mogelijkheden voor vervolgonderzoek besproken.

Introduction

Maintaining a romantic relationship is hard work: In some cases the relationship seems to thrive, whereas sometimes the relationship does not last. The latter situation might foster all kinds of negative consequences such as higher levels of depression, anxiety, and other forms of psychological distress (Coombs, 1991; Cotton, 1999; Simon, 2002), decreased well-being in mental and physical health after divorce for adults and their children (Amato, 2000), and high costs for society due to an often increased dependence on social welfare (Peterson, 1996; Uunk, 2004). Clearly, such findings imply that, instead, being in a long-term romantic relationship has important benefits. Indeed, research shows that being involved in long-term romantic relationships helps us to be happy, live healthily and experience greater subjective well-being (Dush & Amato, 2005; Pietromonaco, Uchino, & Dunkel Schetter, 2013). Given the potential negative outcomes of relationship break-down, it is meaningful to explore when and why long-term romantic relationships fail or thrive. Therefore, research towards the functioning and maintenance of romantic relationships is of great importance.

A lot of proximal factors underlying relationship functioning have been studied, such as personality traits (Bhullar & Rooke, 2010; Lehnart & Neyer, 2006; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte,; Shaver & Brennan, 1992), individual differences in attachment styles (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Lehnart & Neyer, 2006) and self-regulatory abilities (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vohs, Finkenauer, & Baumeister, 2011). Although abovementioned proximal factors surely are important in understanding relationship functioning and quality, only little attention is paid towards the influence of basic human values on romantic relationships. This is remarkable, since human values function as a person's guiding principles in life (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). A recent overview by Schwartz (2013) endorsed this finding as people rated most basic human values as mildly to very important for their lives. Hence, the current research attempts to bridge the research on basic human values with relationship functioning. Specifically, this study focuses on the role of self-transcendence values versus self-enhancement values and their effect on relationship functioning and explores the possible mediating role of partner responsiveness.

Basic human values

As human values serve as a person's guiding principles in life (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990), it might come as no surprise that various well-known psychological and sociological theories stress the importance of values for predicting a range of human behavior (Durkheim, 1964; Grouzet et al., 2005; Schwartz, 1992; Steele, 1988; Weber, 1958). For example, values

have shown to be of great importance in determining shared activities and rituals in society, such as visiting a church (Durkheim, 1964), and in organizing the content of personal goals and aspirations (Grouzet et al., 2005). Values are commonly referred to as a culture's conception of what is important and socially desirable, and they guide goal strivings and the way events and people are evaluated (Kluckhohn, 1951; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990). However, it is only quite recently that theoretical research on human values has experienced a rebirth, with the provision of a clear and universal framework (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 2012; Schwartz et al., 2012; Smith & Schwartz, 1997). The redefined theory of basic human values identifies 19 motivationally distinct types of values¹, which are recognized across cultures (Schwartz et al., 2012). At the core of the theory is the idea that the values form a circular structure that reflect the motivations each value expresses in a culturally universal way (see Figure 1). Each individual prioritizes various values with varying degrees of importance.

These 19 values fall into four higher order types of values, which express two motivational dimensions: self-enhancement versus self-transcendence, and openness to change versus conservation (Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 2013). The first dimension puts values that emphasize the welfare and interests of others (self-transcendence) against values that emphasize pursuit of one's own interests and relative success and dominance over others (self-enhancement). For example, self-transcendence has shown to relate to pro-environmental attitudes (Karp, 1996; Miroso et al., 2013) and cooperation in an organizational context (Schwartz, 2013), whereas self-enhancement has been linked to non-environmental friendly attitudes (Kilborn, Grünhagen, & Foley, 2005, Urien & Kilvourne, 2011), and a failure to cooperate with others (Schwartz, 2013). The second domain puts values that emphasize independence of thought, action, and feelings and readiness for change (openness to change) against values that emphasize order, self-restriction, preservation of the past, and resistance to change (conservation). For example, openness to change values are linked with a high need for intrinsic work motivation (Ros, Schwartz, Surkiss, 1999) and low religiosity (Roccas, 2005) and conservation has shown to relate to religious and political attitudes (Boer & Fisscher, 2013). Hence, values are important for predicting a range of human behaviors, attitudes and opinions in different settings and form the basis of our evaluation (Schwartz, 1992).

¹ See for an overview, Schwartz, 2013.



Figure 1. Circular motivational continuum of 19 values with sources that underlie their order. Adapted from “Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values” (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Values and relationship functioning

As noted above, the extant literature on values has primarily focused on the effect of people’s value priorities on environmental behaviors, political attitudes, organizational behaviors, and decisions. Yet, only a few studies have explored the role of values in relationship functioning. For example, some literature on interpersonal attraction has shown that similarity in personality, attitudes and values benefits attraction (Byrne, 1961). More specifically, perceived value similarity may lead to higher attraction (Curry & Kenny, 1974) and people tend to develop relationships with those whose values are equal to their own values (Lee, Ashton, Pozzobon, Bourdage, & Ogunfowora, 2009). However, rather than *similarity* in people’s value priorities, when and why the *content* of people’s value priorities are related to the functioning of romantic relationships is yet unknown. Specifically, are value priorities such as self-transcendence values versus self-enhancement values associated with different types of relationship functioning? And if so, why?

Some initial evidence may help to build ground for the association between self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values and relationship functioning. At first, Schwartz’s higher order values self-transcendence and self-enhancement seem to correspond in a way with the research of Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck and Steemer (1997) on social value orientations. A prosocial orientation is associated with cooperation and a focus on equality of outcomes (which seems to overlap with self-transcendence values), whereas a proself orientation is associated with self-interest and a focus on own outcomes (which seems to overlap with self-enhancement values). Some initial evidence suggests that prosocial values

(see Joireman, Lasane, Bennett, Richards, & Solaimani, 2001; Nordlund & Garfill, 2002) are associated with a range of relationship-protective behaviors, such as sacrifice (Van Lange, 1999; Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997). In addition, recent research proposed the distinction between communal and agentic values (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012), whereby communal values are associated with warmth, helpfulness, socialness and sincerity (which seem to overlap with self-transcendence values), whereas agentic values are associated with intelligence, determinedness and competence (which seem to overlap with self-enhancement values). Prioritizing communal values is associated with the maintenance of positive relationships, whereas prioritizing agentic values is associated with self-advancement in social hierarchies (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012).

Moreover, an unpublished pilot study of Van der Wal, Karremans, and Maio (2016) already pointed out the importance of self-transcendence in romantic relationships by showing that the endorsement of self-transcendence values (i.e. benevolence and universalism), was related to greater relationship quality and commitment. Since self-enhancement values are placed at the direct opposite of the circular structure against self-transcendence values it is plausible to expect a reversed effect on relationship quality when prioritizing self-enhancement values. This was indeed the case, as the endorsement of self-enhancement values (i.e. achievement and power), was related with lower relationship satisfaction (Van der Wal et al., 2016). Furthermore, no association between openness to change values versus conservation values and relationship quality was found (Van der Wal et al., 2016). Hence, based on the discussed research it is hypothesized that prioritizing self-transcendence values may enhance relationship functioning, whereas prioritizing self-enhancement values may decrease relationship functioning.

Partner responsiveness, values and relationship functioning

How may the endorsement of self-transcendence versus self-enhancement values be related to increased versus decreased relationship functioning? To answer this question, it might be helpful to consider the concept of partner responsiveness. The concept of partner responsiveness holds shared understanding, validation and caring to one's partner (Gable & Reis, 2006). Initial research documents the positive role of responsiveness as a quality for a healthy relationship (Reis & Gable, 2015). To understand in which way partner responsiveness contributes to enhanced relationship functioning, it might be useful to consider the specific values within the overarching dimensions of self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values.

For self-transcendence these values are; benevolence and universalism. Benevolence represents helpfulness, honesty, forgiveness, loyalty and responsibility, while universalism reflects wisdom, broadminded, social justice, equality, protecting the environment and a world at peace (Schwartz, 2013). Responsive relationship partners are warm, sensitive to their partners' feelings, and want to make their partners feel comfortable, valued, listened to, and understood. Thus, responsive partners really try to be helpful and take responsibility (Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). As stated above, helpfulness and being responsible are both key characteristics of benevolence (Schwartz, 2013). It is therefore hypothesized that prioritizing self-transcendence values is related to increased partner responsiveness, which in turn facilitates relationship functioning and enhances relationship quality.

Moreover, the concept of partner responsiveness may also help explain why self-enhancement values are negatively related to relationship functioning. Specific values within the higher order type of self-enhancement are power and achievement, whereby the value of power may contribute most clearly to this expectation. Power reflects the need for social status, prestige and control or dominance over people or resources, while achievement reflects personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (Schwartz, 2013). The value power may contribute most directly to this expectation, as power reflects the need for dominance over people or resources, which certainly does not flourish with the definition of a responsive partner, who really tries to be helpful, warm and sensitive to their partners' feelings (Zimet et al., 1988). Furthermore, when exploring the role of self-enhancement values in other domains, a recent study by Arthaud-Day, Rode and Turnley (2012) describes the relation between prioritizing the value of power and organizational citizenship behaviors. Organizational citizenship behaviors refer to gestures such as being helpful to colleagues (Organ, 1988) and support and enhance the social and psychological context of the work domain (Organ, 1997). Arthaud-Day and colleagues (2012) showed that people who prioritized the value of power scored lower on organizational citizenship behaviors and thus, for example, not often act helpful towards colleagues. In addition, psychological literature often stresses the relationship between self-enhancement and narcissism (Asendorpf & Ostendorf, 1998; Paulhus, 1998; Taylor et. al, 2003), whereby narcissism, amongst other things, refers to a lack of empathy and warmth towards others (Campbell and Baumeister, 2006). Therefore, it is hypothesized that prioritizing self-enhancement values, and in particular the value of power, is related to decreased partner responsiveness which in turn may hinder relationship functioning.

The present research

The central hypothesis underlying this research is that individual's value priorities are associated with relationship functioning. Specifically, it is expected that individuals who prioritize self-transcendence values experience increased relationship functioning (H1a), whereas individuals who prioritize self-enhancement values experience decreased relationship functioning (H1b). Furthermore, partner responsiveness is expected to mediate the association between self-transcendence versus self-enhancement values and relationship functioning. Specifically, it is expected that individuals who prioritize self-transcendence values are more responsive towards their partner (H2a), which is associated with increased relationship functioning, whereas individuals who prioritize self-enhancement values are less responsive towards their partner (H2b), which is associated with decreased relationship functioning (See appendix A).

To test this prediction, individual differences in value priorities, relationship functioning and responsiveness towards their partner were measured. In Study 1 is tested whether individual's value priorities are associated with relationship functioning and if this association is mediated by partner responsiveness. In Study 2 is tested whether the relation between value priorities and partner responsiveness and relationship functioning is correlational or causal by manipulating self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values. These two studies should provide insight into the question if, how and why values are associated with relationship functioning.

Study 1

The goal of Study 1 was to examine the association between self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values and relationship functioning. It was expected that a relatively higher priority of self-transcendence values was associated with increased relationship functioning, while a higher priority of self-enhancement values was associated with decreased relationship functioning. Furthermore, the association between prioritizing self-transcendence values versus self-enhancement values and relationship functioning is expected to be (partly) explained by partner responsiveness. As such, people prioritizing self-transcendence values are expected to have higher scores on partners responsiveness, while people prioritizing self-enhancement values are expected to have lower scores on partner responsiveness. In turn, partner responsiveness is expected to be positively associated with relationship functioning.

Method

Participants

A total of 233 participants took part in the online study, of which 46 participants were excluded from the analyses due to not completing the survey. The questionnaire included 3 trick questions, to determine whether participants completed the questionnaire seriously (e.g. ‘Place a tick in box 4’). Participants who answered more than one trick question falsely were also excluded ($n = 6$). Hence, the final sample consisted of 181 participants (145 women and 36 men), ages ranged from 18 to 70 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.99$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.93$). A total of 140 participants were involved in a romantic relationship ($M_{\text{length}}(\text{years}) = 16.7$ years, $SD_{\text{length}} = 12.24$). All participants completed any form of school (elementary school 0.6%, high school 16.0%, intermediate vocational education 16.6%, university of applied sciences 34.8%, university degree 32.0%). Participants were recruited by posting information on Facebook and reached through snowball sampling. Participating in this study was completely voluntary and participants had a chance to win one of the twenty €10,00 Bol.com gift cards.

Procedure

The data were collected using Qualtrics software in spring 2016. After giving informed consent, participants were instructed that they would receive several questionnaires concerning their value priorities and relationship functioning. Participants were allowed to quit the survey at any point. The total survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Measures

Values. To measure personal values, participants completed the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) (Schwartz et al., 2012), which was translated into Dutch. The PVQ consists of short verbal portraits of 57 individuals, gender-matched with the participant. Each portrait illustrates an individual’s goals or aspirations that point implicitly towards the prioritizing of a value. The 19 values were measured with three items per value. An example item of the value achievement is ‘It is important for him to have ambitions in life’ and for the value benevolence-care ‘It is important for her to help people that are close to her’. For each portrait, participants answered ‘How much like you is this person?’ The answers were ranked on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not like me at all*) to 7 (*very much like me*). The reliability of the 19 values was sufficient for all values, except for Security Personal and

Security Societal. However, the reliability of all items of the overarching Security value was sufficient (See Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics 19 values Study 1

Values	M	SD	α
Self-direction Thought	4.79	.73	.63
Self-direction Action	5.05	.67	.63
Stimulation	3.78	.98	.71
Hedonism	4.69	.75	.72
Achievement	4.02	.97	.69
Power-Dominance	2.85	.96	.71
Power-Resources	2.20	.93	.70
Face	3.95	.88	.80
Security Personal	4.34	.73	.56
Security Societal	4.18	.99	.47
Tradition	3.14	1.09	.75
Conformity-Rules	3.64	1.06	.79
Conformity-Interpersonal	4.09	1.05	.81
Humility	4.04	.98	.80
Universalism-Nature	3.56	1.10	.65
Universalism-Concern	4.76	.83	.87
Universalism-Tolerance	4.78	.75	.67
Benevolence-Care	5.03	.74	.64
Benevolence-Dependability	5.22	.54	.77

In the analyses, we used the four higher order values self-transcendence (benevolence-dependability, benevolence-caring, universalism-concern, universalism-nature, universalism-tolerance), self-enhancement (power-resources, power-dominance, achievement), openness to change (self-direction-thought, self-direction-action, stimulation, hedonism) and conservation (security-personal, security-social, conformity-interpersonal, conformity-rules, tradition, humility, face). Participants' mean score on a specific value, which consisted of three items, in relation to the mean score for all values was controlled for; the mean score for every specific value was calculated and subtracted by the mean score for all values. In this way, individual differences in use of the response scales were eliminated and meaningful interpretation of the values was possible.

Partner responsiveness. A modified version of a responsiveness measure (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997; Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006) was used to measure partner responsiveness, which consisted of 6 items. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point

Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 8 (*Strongly agree*). An example question is: ‘I really try to understand my partner’s feelings’. The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 2).

Relationship satisfaction. The Investment Model Scale was used to measure relationship satisfaction (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998), which consisted of 5 items. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 8 (*Strongly agree*). An example question is: ‘I feel very satisfied with our relationship’. The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 2).

Relationship commitment. The Investment Model Scale was used to measure relationship commitment (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998), which consisted of 7 items. Item 3 and item 4 were recoded before the analyses. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 8 (*Strongly agree*). An example question is: ‘I want our relationship to last forever’. The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 2).

Relationship functioning. Given that relationship satisfaction and relationship commitment were strongly correlated with one another ($r=.64$), a composite score for these variables was created, indicating relationship functioning. This was done by standardizing the two measures, so that they were on the same metric, and subsequently taking the average. The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive statistics variables Study 1

Measure	M	SD	α
Partner responsiveness	8.06	.85	.92
Relationship satisfaction	7.35	1.43	.90
Relationship commitment	8.01	1.24	.86
Relationship functioning	7.74	1.18	.91

Statistical analyses. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Correlation and regression analyses were conducted.

Results

Correlations

Value priorities and relationship functioning. First, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether value priorities are correlated with the composite relationship functioning score. In contrast to hypothesis 1a, the analysis revealed no significant correlation between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning. In line with hypothesis 1b, the analysis revealed a (marginally) significant negative correlation between self-enhancement values and relationship functioning. For openness to change values and conservation values no significant correlations were found with relationship functioning. See table 3 for an overview of the correlations of Study 1.

In addition, correlational analyses were performed using the different indicators of relationship functioning; commitment and satisfaction. In line with hypothesis 1b, the analysis revealed a significant correlation between self-enhancement values and relationship commitment, which indicated that self-enhancement values and relationship commitment are negatively associated with each other. The analysis revealed no significant correlation between self-enhancement values and relationship satisfaction, and no significant correlation between self-transcendence values and relationship commitment and relationship satisfaction.

Partner responsiveness. Furthermore, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine whether value priorities and relationship functioning are correlated with partner responsiveness (See Table 3). In line with our reasoning, the analysis revealed a significant effect between relationship functioning and partner responsiveness, which indicated that relationship functioning and partner responsiveness were positively associated with each other. However, contrary to hypothesis 2, the analysis revealed no significant correlation between self-transcendence values or self-enhancement values and partner responsiveness (See Table 3). For this reason, no mediation analyses with self-transcendence values or self-enhancement values as independent variables, relationship functioning as dependent variable and partner responsiveness as mediator variable, were performed.

Table 3

Inter Correlations of Main Study Variables (Study 1)

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-transcendence values	-	.50**	.71**	.45**	.05	.04	.05	-.02
2. Self-enhancement values		-	.75**	.45**	-.14	-.20*	-.04	-.12
3. Openness to change values			-	.51**	-.03	-.09	.04	-.02
3. Conservation values				-	.02	.01	.03	-.10
4. Relationship functioning					-	.91**	.87**	.56**
5. Relationship commitment						-	.60**	.46**
6. Relationship satisfaction							-	.55**
7. Partner responsiveness								-

Note. The correlations are measured by using the z-scores of all variables; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Exploratory analyses: Control variables

Self-enhancement values and control variables. At first, a correlation analysis was conducted between self-enhancement values and several control variables, respectively; age, relationship length, gender, and education. The analysis only revealed a significant negative correlation ($r = -.42, p < .001$) between self-enhancement values and age, which indicated that the relative priority of self-enhancement values becomes higher with age.

To explore whether the association between high priority of self-enhancement values and decreased relationship commitment remained significant after controlling for respectively age, relationship length, gender and education, a regression analysis with self-enhancement values as independent variable and relationship commitment as dependent variable was conducted. Even after inclusion of control variables, the analysis yielded a significant effect of self-enhancement on relationship commitment ($p < .05$). In conclusion, even after controlling for several substantial control variables the relationship between self-enhancement values and relationship commitment was evident.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 revealed that self-enhancement values are (marginally) negatively associated with relationship functioning, and in particular relationship commitment. This association did not seem to be mediated by partner responsiveness. In addition, no relations between self-transcendence values, openness to change values and conservation values and relationship functioning were found.

Study 2 was conducted to examine whether individuals' values priorities predict

relationship functioning, in a causal manner. It was expected that individuals who were primed with self-enhancement values reported decreased relationship functioning (H3). Although earlier findings documented the positive relationship of self-transcendence values and relationship functioning (Van der Wal et al., 2016), no relationship between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning was found in Study 1. To further explore these contradictory findings a prime of self-transcendence values was included in Study 2. It was expected that individuals who were primed with self-transcendence values reported increased relationship functioning (H4). For the control group we expected no effects on relationship functioning. Although no results were found for partner responsiveness in Study 1, exploratory analyses were conducted.

Method

Participants and design

A total of 253 participants started the online study. A number of 118 participants were excluded from the analyses due to not completing the survey, 2 participants did not complete the manipulation questions seriously, and 7 participants completed more than 1 manipulation condition, and were deleted before analysis. Hence, the final sample consisted of 125 participants (105 women and 20 men), ages ranged from 18 to 68 years ($M_{\text{age}} = 26.44$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 10.71$). A total of 72 participants were involved in a romantic relationship ($M_{\text{length}}(\text{years}) = 7.48$ years, $SD_{\text{length}} = 9.55$). All participants completed any form of school (high school 39.2%, intermediate vocational education 8.0%, university of applied sciences 18.4%, university degree 34.4%). Participants were recruited using Facebook, reached through snowball sampling and by making use of the University Credit System. Participating in this study was completely voluntary. By participating in the study, participants were able to earn 0.25 credits. The study had a between-subjects design, whereby a distinction was made between three conditions, namely; Self-Enhancement prime condition ($N = 43$), Self-transcendence prime condition ($N = 39$), and a control condition ($N = 43$). The main dependent variable was relationship functioning.

Procedure

The data were collected in Spring 2016 using Qualtrics software. After giving informed consent, participants were instructed that they would receive several questionnaires concerning their value priorities, relationship functioning and partner responsiveness. Participants were allowed to quit the survey at any point. The total survey took approximately

10 minutes to complete. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Measures

Value primes. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three value prime conditions; self-enhancement, self-transcendence, or control condition. To prime self-enhancement values, a manipulation of power was used (Galinsky et al., 2003) in combination with a manipulation of achievement. That is, participants were first asked to write at least 200 characters about a situation in which they had power over another individual or individuals. Power was defined as a situation in which the participant had the ability to control something what an individual or individuals wanted or were in a position to evaluate those individuals. Next, participants were asked to write at least 200 characters about how this situation they just described contributed to their personal success. An example description someone gave is the following: *‘The kids in my class have to be in line with their buddy before they can go outside. Sometimes it might seem a useless action, because it takes a lot of energy every day to realize, but I want them to listen to me. At this moment I experience some kind of power, because not standing in a row means not getting to go outside. When the children listen to me they become more calm and back in class they get back to work faster. I could see this as a personal success, because it means for me not spending useless time correcting them and more time to give a fun lesson. Moreover, when they are calm it is good for the ambiance in the group.’*

To prime self-transcendence values, participants were asked to imagine what it would be like to have a child (Foad, Maio, Karremans, Van der Wal, & Gebrauer, 2014), and asked to write at least 200 characters about their (imaginary) child, for example what their child would look like or write something about his/her personality. This prime was based on an earlier study (Foad et al., 2014), which has shown to activate self-transcendence values in a naturalistic way. An example description someone gave is the following: *‘Having a child would be a great responsibility, that will keep me very busy. I like the idea of having a child on my own and that it would look like me, but it would be difficult to find a balance between ‘perfectly’ raising the child and to let your child make their own choices. I think my child will be stubborn, sweet and curious. It is somewhat difficult to describe my child, because I don’t know if the baby mostly gets my characteristics or my partners’. In general I think my child will have blue eyes and will be sweet and loyal.’*

Participants in the control condition answered two questions about their breakfast, which are the following: ‘Describe the breakfast you have eaten this morning’ and ‘Describe

what your breakfast looks like’.

Manipulation check. As a manipulation check, participants rated their importance of the items concerning self-enhancement values (power and achievement) and self-transcendence values (benevolence and universalism), based on the Short Schwartz’s Value Survey (SVSS (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005)), which consisted of 4 items. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*opposed to my principles*), 1 (*not important*), to 8 (*very important*). The reliability of the values was insufficient. However, insufficient Cronbach Alpha’s for the SVS were reported as well in research of Lindeman and Verkasalo (2005), who argued that Cronbach alpha’s probably underestimate the actual reliability of the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) and the Short Schwartz Value Survey (SVSS).

Relationship functioning. As in Study 1, the Investment Model Scale was used to measure relationship functioning (Rusbult, Martz & Agnew, 1998), which consisted of 12 items. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 8 (*Strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 4).

Partner responsiveness. As in Study 1, a modified version of a responsiveness measure (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997; Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006) was used to measure partner responsiveness, which consisted of 6 items. Participants answered the questions on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*Strongly disagree*) to 8 (*Strongly agree*). The reliability of the scale was sufficient (See Table 4).

Table 4

Descriptive statistics variables Study 2

Measure	M	SD	α
Partner responsiveness	8.14	.81	.90
Relationship satisfaction	7.62	.97	.83
Relationship commitment	7.62	1.13	.89
Relationship functioning	6.86	.74	.91

Statistical analyses

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. At first a manipulation check was done using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). In addition, correlational analyses, multivariate analyses of variance and a mediation analysis were conducted.

Results

Manipulation check. First, a manipulation check was done to examine whether the prime of self-enhancement values and the prime of self-transcendence values, compared to the control condition, was successful. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with Self-Enhancement Values and Self-Transcendence Values as dependent variables and Value Prime (Self-enhancement Prime versus Self-transcendence Prime versus Control Condition) as between subjects factor. The analysis revealed a significant effect of Value Prime on Self-enhancement Values, $F(2,122) = 4.41, p = .014, \eta^2 = .07$, but not on self-transcendence values, $F(2,122) = .70, p = .50, \eta^2 = .01$. In line with hypothesis 3a, a pairwise comparison revealed that people showed higher priority for self-enhancement values when indeed primed with self-enhancement values ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.26$) rather than self-transcendence values ($M = 4.71, SD = 1.46, p < .01$), or (marginally) when in the control condition ($M = 5.12, SD = 1.70, p = .08$). In conclusion, the self-enhancement prime indicated to be successful, as a difference between the three groups was found on self-enhancement values, while no difference between the groups was found when primed with the thoughts of having children (self-transcendence prime) on subsequent self-transcendence values.

Value prime and relationship functioning. After checking whether the manipulation was successful, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with Relationship Functioning and Relationship Commitment as dependent variables and Value Prime (Self-enhancement Prime versus Self-transcendence Prime versus Control Condition) as between subjects factor. Contrary to hypothesis 3 and hypothesis 4, the analysis revealed no difference between groups on Relationship Functioning, $F(2,71) = 1.05, p = .36, \eta^2 = .03$, and no difference between groups on Relationship Commitment, $F(2,71) = 1.38, p = .26, \eta^2 = .03$.

Exploratory analyses

Value priorities (manipulation check) and relationship functioning. Exploratory analyses were conducted to examine whether the findings of Study 1 could be replicated. That is, whether value priorities (manipulation check) are correlated with relationship functioning and relationship commitment, when controlling for the value prime. A correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning. Contrary to hypothesis 3b, the analysis revealed no significant negative

correlation between self-enhancement values and relationship functioning. As in Study 1, the reported effects were driven by relationship commitment. See table 5 for an overview of the correlations of Study 2.

Partner responsiveness. A correlation analysis revealed a significant correlation between relationship functioning and partner responsiveness, which indicated that relationship functioning and partner responsiveness were, as in Study 1, positively associated with each other. In addition, the analysis revealed a significant correlation between self-transcendence values and partner responsiveness (See Table 5), but no significant correlation between self-enhancement values and partner responsiveness. In study 1 initially a mediation analysis was planned, which could not be performed as partner responsiveness was not correlated with either self-enhancement values or self-transcendence values. Since partner responsiveness correlated with both self-transcendence values and relationship functioning in the second study, a mediation analysis was conducted with self-transcendence values as independent variable, relationship functioning as dependent variable and partner responsiveness as mediator variable. In addition, to ensure the significance of the mediation effect a mediation analysis with the PROCES SPSS-macro of Preacher & Hayes (2008) was conducted afterwards, using 1000 bootstraps and bias-corrected confidence estimates. The confidence intervals were reported and were in line with the earlier performed mediation analysis.

First, a regression analysis was conducted to check whether self-transcendence values were associated with relationship functioning. This analysis yielded a significant effect of self-transcendence values on relationship functioning, $\beta = .24$, $t(72) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [.01, .30]. Next, a regression analysis was conducted to check whether self-transcendence values were associated with partner responsiveness. Third, and most importantly, a regression analysis with both self-transcendence values and partner responsiveness on relationship functioning revealed that the association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning disappeared, $\beta = -.04$, $t(72) = -.36$, $p = .72$, 95% CI [-.16, .12]. Hence, the current findings seem to suggest, in line with hypothesis 2a, that partner responsiveness mediates the effect of self-transcendence values on relationship functioning (see Figure 3).

Table 5

Inter Correlations of Main Study Variables Study 2, controlled for Value Prime.

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Self-transcendence values	-	-.05	.24*	.33**	.15	.47**
2. Self-enhancement values		-	-.02	-.09	.02	.13
3. Relationship functioning			-	.80**	.91**	.58**
4. Relationship commitment				-	.65**	.43**
5. Relationship satisfaction					-	.62**
6. Partner responsiveness						-

Note. The correlations are measured by using the z-scores of all variables; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

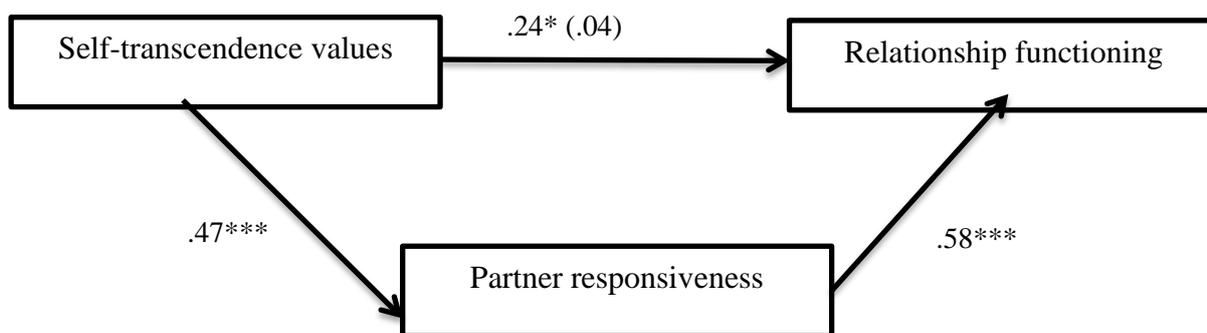


Figure 3. The standardized regression coefficient for the association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning. The standardized regression coefficient between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning, controlling for partner responsiveness, is between brackets; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

General discussion

In a set of two studies, we sought support for the central hypothesis that value priorities and relationship functioning are associated, and we explored the possible mediating role of partner responsiveness. The results of Study 1 and Study 2 were not conclusive, but nonetheless provided insight into the research topic and gave input for future research. It was hypothesized that people who prioritize self-transcendence values may experience increased relationship functioning (H1a), whereas people who prioritize self-enhancement values may experience decreased relationship functioning (H1b). As expected, decreased relationship functioning was documented in Study 1, when prioritizing self-enhancement values (H1b). However, no association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning (H1a), and no mediating role of partner responsiveness (H2) was reported in Study 1. In Study 2, the possibility to (temporarily) influence people's value priorities was tested by the use of a value prime. The self-enhancement value prime was found to be successful, although no further effect of self-enhancement values on relationship functioning was reported (H3). In contrast, the self-transcendence prime was not successful (H4), although Study 2 supported the positive association between prioritizing self-transcendence values and relationship functioning when controlling for the value prime. Moreover, in line with hypothesis 2a, partner responsiveness showed to completely mediate the positive association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning in Study 2.

When and how are value priorities associated with relationship functioning?

The main goal for this study was to examine when and how value priorities may be associated with relationship functioning. In line with previous findings of Van der Wal et al. (2016), participants who prioritized self-enhancement values reported to experience lower relationship functioning in Study 1. However, these findings were not replicated in Study 2. Furthermore, contrary to the study of Van der Wal et al. (2016) no positive association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning was found in Study 1. This finding contrasts the discussed literature that seems to link self-transcendence values to a prosocial value orientation, which in turn is associated with relationship-protective behaviors such as sacrifice (Van Lange, 1999), and communal values, which in turn is associated with the maintenance of positive relationships (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). However, a positive association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning was reported in Study 2, after controlling for the value prime. As the results indicated to be inconclusive, several explanations for the above findings will be discussed.

A first explanation for not finding a positive association between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning may be found in the scores on relationship functioning values in Study 1. That is, people reported to experience extremely high relationship functioning in Study 1 in general, which may result in only a small differentiation in experienced relationship functioning between those prioritizing self-transcendence values and those not prioritizing self-transcendence values. This explanation may be supported by the findings of Study 2, whereby people reported to experience relatively lower relationship functioning in general than in Study 1, and a positive association between prioritizing self-transcendence and relationship functioning was reported. Thus, perhaps the relatively lower relationship functioning reported in Study 2 made a difference between those prioritizing self-transcendence values and those not prioritizing self-transcendence values more likely to be revealed. Relatedly, a more substantial explanation for the high reported relationship functioning, mostly clear in Study 1, might lie in the tendency to give socially desirable answers, especially on topics that concern cultural norms, such as being in a healthy and romantic relationship (Brown, 1984; DeMaio, 1984). Thus, as participants may be pressured by such a norm this may lead them to exaggerate on how good they actually experience their relationship. In this way, the mean rates on relationship functioning may be overestimated. Future research might want to consider using more implicit questionnaires to measure relationship functioning, such as the Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (IOS) which measures relationship closeness and has shown to be less susceptible for socially desirable answers (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).

Moreover, a second explanation for the inconclusive findings might lie in a difference between Study 1 and Study 2 in the way values were measured. In Study 1 the Portrait Value Questionnaire (consisting of 57 items) was used, which measured all 19 values in a rather implicit way, while in Study 2 the Short Schwartz's Value Survey (consisting of 4 items) was used, which measured self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values only and in a more explicit way. Thus, this difference may have led participants to interpret the questions differently and explain the inconclusive associations between values and relationship functioning. Future research might want to measure value priorities in a consequent way, preferably with the PVQ as this questionnaire has shown to support a more abstract and context-free way of thinking (Schwartz, 2013).

Third, the inconclusive findings concerning the role of self-transcendence values on relationship functioning might be partly explained by a high positive correlation between self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values reported in Study 1. Possibly, such high

positive correlation made a differentiation on relationship functioning between people prioritizing either self-transcendence values or self-enhancement values less likely to be apparent.

Can we prime values?

A second important goal for this study was to examine whether value priorities can be primed, by making use of value primes in Study 2. In the first place, these value primes allowed us to determine whether the relationship between value priorities and relationship functioning is correlational or causal, which gave rise to an underexposed yet relevant direction in research. However, in contrast with earlier findings of Foad et al. (2014) the present study did not replicate the working of the self-transcendence prime. On the other hand, the present research accomplished to successfully develop and use a self-enhancement prime, adapted from a power prime used in earlier research (Galinsky et al., 2003). Two possible explanations for why the primes only partly seemed to have worked will be discussed.

A first explanation for not finding an effect of the self-transcendence prime might lie in the tendency to adjust to the social norm: People invoke values to define certain behavior as socially appropriate (Schwartz, 2013). As experimental evidence (Fehr & Fishbacher, 2004) indicates the existence of a norm to cooperate with others, people may already tend to report higher priority for self-transcendence values as compared to self-enhancement. The data of Study 2 amplifies this assumption as people seemed to prioritize self-transcendence values far more than self-enhancement values in general, which in turn may have lowered the possibility to differentiate on self-transcendence values by means of the self-transcendence prime.

More broadly though, it perhaps could be the case that the value primes were not strong enough. That is, in the present study both primes were used as part of an online study, which may affect the working of the prime as the environment in which people completed the survey was not controlled for. As such, based on the long average time participants took to complete the survey, the question may be raised whether participants were distracted while taking the survey. This may have lowered the working of the prime, as effects of a prime are often only to be measured very temporarily (Kuzyakov, Friedel, & Star, 2000). Moreover, the way in which the data in both studies is collected, namely largely through Facebook, may raise some general issues concerning data collection. Although the present data reported adequate distinction in factors such as age and relationship length, we should be aware that

collecting data by this type of ‘snowball sampling’ may result in an homogeneous sample (Scott, 2013). Future research might want to address these discussed limitations by designing a lab study to explore whether and under which conditions these value primes may work, and by using an even larger and more heterogeneous sample.

Implications, strengths and directions for future research

The present research distinguished itself from previous research in several ways. At first, the finding that self-enhancement values can be primed (Study 2) does not strike with existent literature that considers values as relatively stable over time (Murphy, 1989; Rokeach, 1973). Peoples’ values are generally seen as a highly stable dispositional variable which may help to predict different behaviors, such as job performance (Rokeach, 1973). Thus, the present findings may challenge the role of values as a research construct.

Second, the present research focused on the more distal factor of basic human values, instead of on previously mentioned proximal factors such as personality traits (Bhullar & Rooke, 2010), and, even more, stretched a new angle in research towards relationship functioning by focusing more specifically on the *content* of values rather than similarity in values. By looking into certain value priorities, although further research is needed to understand the exact effects, new insights may be provided that may eventually facilitate the integration of values in different areas where values have shown to be important, such as counseling and psychotherapy programs (Patterson, 1989; Wilson & Murrell, 2004).

In the third place, by introducing the concept of partner responsiveness in the present study the question of *why* value priorities may influence relationship functioning is explored, rather than only asking *if* and *when* value priorities may influence relationship functioning. It was expected that partner responsiveness may mediate the relationship between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning. This was based on the fact that responsive partners try to be helpful and take responsibility (Zimet et al., 1988), which seems to correspond with the key characteristics of one of the values in the self-transcendence domain, that is benevolence; being helpful and responsible (Schwartz, 2013). As in Study 2 partner responsiveness showed to completely mediate the relation between self-transcendence values and relationship functioning, a first step has been taken in clarifying *why* prioritizing self-transcendence values may enhance relationship functioning. Thus, it might be valuable to consider including this concept in future research.

Besides, future research could expand its scope and explore other mechanisms that may help explain why self-transcendence values may enhance relationship functioning. An

emerging concept in research towards romantic relationship functioning is that of mindfulness (Karremans, Schellekens, & Kappens, 2015), which has already shown to relate to greater relationship satisfaction (Barnes, Brown, Krusemark, Campbell, & Rogge, 2007).

Mindfulness can be described as a way of mental training to develop self-transcendence by creating a positive relationship between self and other that transcends self-focused needs and increases prosocial characteristics (Vago & David, 2012). Thus, it might be valuable to consider including the concept of mindfulness in future research towards value priorities and relationship functioning in particular.

In a similar way, another underlying mechanism that may be considered to explore in future research towards value priorities and relationship functioning is a difference in attachment styles. Although individual differences in attachment styles already have shown to influence relationship functioning (Lehnart & Neyer, 2006), the possible influence of attachment styles on value priorities in understanding relationship functioning is a yet underexposed area of research. However, a recent study already addressed the role between attachment theory and value priorities by demonstrating that a high priority for self-transcendence values is associated with lower attachment avoidance (Mikulincer et al., 2003). Thus, future research may want to include the concept of attachment styles to explore its' precise way of working.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present research shed light on the role of value priorities and relationship functioning and introduced some new theoretical perspectives and methodological opportunities to the research field. Although the results were inconclusive, it became evident that especially self-transcendence values and self-enhancement values seemed to influence relationship functioning, rather than openness to change values and conservation values. Furthermore, the concept of partner responsiveness seemed to help in clarifying the underlying reason *why*, rather than *if*, self-transcendence values may affect relationship functioning. The present paper hopefully represents an important step in exploring the underlying processes of relationship functioning using basic human values. As these underlying processes of why relationships fail or thrive are becoming more clear, this eventually enables us to translate this knowledge into practice.

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Appendix A

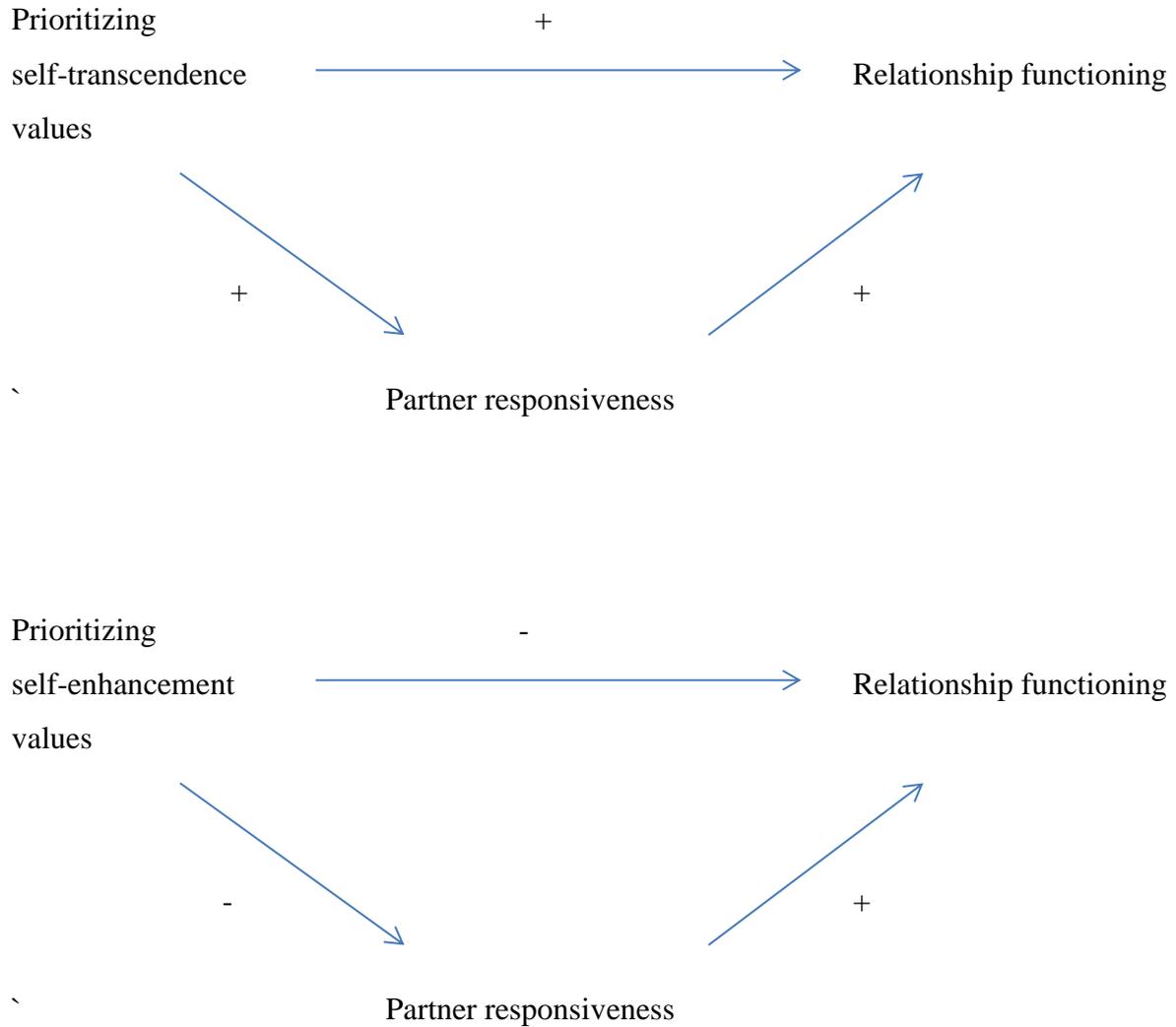


Figure 2. Process Models of the Hypothesized Effects of Self-transcendence Values versus Self-enhancement Values on Relationship Functioning, including Partner Responsiveness.