

Having the will, finding the ways, and wishes for the future: A model of relational hope and well-being

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Abstract

Hope is a ubiquitous experience in daily life and acts as a force to help individuals attain desired future outcomes. In the current paper, we review existing research on hope and its benefits. Building on this work, we propose a new model of hope in romantic relationships. Our model seeks to expand the study of hope, addressing limitations of past research by bringing hope into the interpersonal domain and adding a future-oriented perspective. More specifically, we argue that relational hope encompasses three facets, including *relational agency*, *relational pathways*, and *relational aspirations*, or what we call the *wills*, *ways*, and *wishes* people have in their relationship. We outline specific ways that these three facets may promote well-being in romantic relationships. First, we propose that relational agency—the motivation to achieve relational goals—fuels approach-motivated goals, which in turn promotes higher quality relationships. Additionally, we posit that relational pathways—the perception of sufficient strategies to pursue relational goals—enhance self-regulation to support effective communication and conflict management with a romantic partner. Finally, we propose that relational aspirations—the positive emotions felt in anticipation of future relationship outcomes—foster growth beliefs which in turn promote relationship maintenance and commitment over time. While our model posits that relational hope has

many potential benefits for relationships, we also discuss key contexts in which hope may undermine relationships and well-being. Overall, our proposed model of relational hope offers a new area of insight into how hope may shape well-being in romantic relationships.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Through good times and bad, hope may guide couples through their relationship by providing an image of a positive future that feels attainable. For example, Jenna and Jordan may be generally happy in their relationship, but lately they have both been very busy at work which is negatively affecting their relationship dynamics. With this in mind, Jordan might set a goal to spend more time with Jenna. Jordan may feel confident and motivated in attaining his goal of spending more time with Jenna, increasing his likelihood of achieving his goal. In other words, he feels *agency*—or the *will*—to meet this goal he has set for his relationship. Additionally, Jordan can generate many different ideas of how to spend time with Jenna, such as planning a weekend trip away together or having a phone call on their commutes home from work. This represents Jordan's *pathways*—or the *ways*—that he can plan to reach his goal. Finally, Jordan might feel positively at the prospect of spending more time with Jenna and derives happiness from imagining their future together. Accordingly, Jordan might have *aspirations*—or *wishes*—that strengthen his desire to meet his goal.

This example demonstrates the different facets of *relational hope* and suggests how hopeful individuals may achieve positive outcomes in their relationship. Despite prolific work on hope as a general, intrapersonal phenomenon, the role of hope as manifested in our relationships with others is a relatively understudied area. In the current article, we review the predominant model of general hope. We then present our new model of relational hope and its consequences for well-being. With romantic relationships being one of our closest and most intimate bonds we have in life, understanding new avenues for strengthening these relationships has important implications for health and well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Wong, 1998). Accordingly, our new model proposes three key components of hope—people's relational *wills*, *ways*, and *wishes*—that may shape the well-being of both partners in romantic relationships in important ways.

2 | NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOPE

Oftentimes we consider hope to convey an expression of desire or wanting something positive to happen in the future.¹ However, early empirical work in psychology has defined hope as the overall perception that an individual can meet their goals. Specifically, one of the most prominent models of hope was proposed by C.R. Snyder (1991), which included a trilogy of goals, agency, and pathways in studying how hopeful individuals reach desired outcomes (Snyder, 2002). This model was unique in that it divided positive expectancies for goal attainment into two dimensions: *hope agency*, the motivation or determination to meet one's desired goals, and *hope pathways*, the perception of available strategies to successfully reach these goals (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). Throughout a given goal sequence, agency and pathways thinking work in an iterative cycle, continuously informing one another throughout the goal pursuit and adjusting to goal blockages or stressors (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991). The cognitive set of agency and pathways inform individuals' emotional state during goal pursuit (Snyder et al., 1991, 1999), with those high in hope predisposed to a positive emotion set and those low in hope predisposed to a negative emotion set (Snyder, 2002). Finally, the success of the goal attainment will feed back to inform the individual's perceptions of agency and pathways (Snyder, 2000), which will later be utilized during the next goal pursuit (Feldman et al., 2009).

This model of hope has been generative in identifying the benefits of hope across various life domains, including physical health (Berg et al., 2011; Richman et al., 2005; Schiavon et al., 2016), academic achievement (Day et al., 2010), mental health (Griggs, 2017; Visser et al., 2013), interpersonal relationships (Chang, 1998; Segrin & Taylor, 2007), and subjective well-being (Alarcon et al., 2013; Pleeing et al., 2019).

Nonetheless, a number of limitations and critiques have been raised about the study of hope. First, research has conceptualized hope as an intrapersonal process, being experienced internally and predicting intrapersonal outcomes. This approach has not addressed how hope may be influenced by external sources outside of the individual (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002), such as a close relationship partner. Some research has partially addressed this issue by including how an individual draws on close others (e.g., family, friends) to fuel individual goal attainment (Bernardo, 2010; Du & King, 2013). Additionally, romantic relationships have also been recognized as a key life domain in which hopeful thought may operate (Lopez et al., 2000; Snyder et al., 2018). Accordingly, some efforts to measure individuals' hope for their relationships have been made (see the Domain Specific Hope Scale; Sympson, 1999). However, these prior approaches tap people's orientation toward initiating new romantic relationships or meeting potential partners (Sympson, 1999), rather than sustaining long-term relationships and pursuing relational goals with a committed partner. Thus, it is yet unknown how hope in committed relationships shapes longer-term outcomes in the pursuit of relational goals, an area of which we seek to address in the current work.

Another critique of the predominant model of hope is that it neglects feelings, and specifically positive expectations, about the future (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002; Callina et al., 2018). This is an important aspect to add given that a predominant notion of hope often involves how individuals see the future (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002). Addressing future orientation in a model of relational hope would be beneficial given that people may not only hope for positive outcomes in their relationship in the moment, but they may hope that their relationship continues to flourish years into the future. Relatedly, positive feelings toward the future, captured by feelings of cherishing or longing, are also absent from the general hope model (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002). Although positive emotions about the future may be central in understanding goal pursuit, the general hope model regards emotions as dependent upon perceptions of agency and pathways thinking (Snyder et al., 1991), or as influential in the monitoring stage of goal pursuit (Snyder, 2002). However, other research suggests that positive anticipatory emotions are a key motivator of goal-directed activity (Bagozzi et al., 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2008), and thus may be a relevant factor throughout the pursuit of goals.

Building off these critiques of past research, we present a new model of relational hope by extending the general hope model in two ways. First, we propose a dyadic perspective on relational hope by considering partner and relationship-level factors, alongside individual factors, in influencing the development of relational hope and its outcomes. Second, we incorporate future orientation and emotions into the hope construct by including a new facet called relational aspirations, or positive feelings in anticipation of future outcomes, as another central component in helping hopeful individuals meet their relational goals.

3 | THE DEVELOPMENT OF RELATIONAL HOPE

Although initially defined as originating within the individual (Snyder et al., 1991), we believe that relational hope is influenced by both an individual and their partner. One individual difference factor found to be important for the development of hopeful thinking, and likely relational hope as well, is attachment (Snyder, 1994). Specifically, it has been found that attachment security is associated with higher levels of hope while attachment anxiety and avoidance are associated with lower levels of hope (Shorey et al., 2003). Partner behaviors may also influence one's relational hope. For example, buffering those with an insecure attachment—such as through supporting their autonomy or providing reassurance—helps to prevent negative relationship outcomes and alleviate a partner's distress (Simpson & Overall, 2014). Over time, partner buffering behaviors may help foster a sense of hopefulness in relationship partners by promoting greater relationship security (Simpson & Overall, 2014).

Factors within a relationship unit may also play a role in the development of relational hope. Individuals may identify past experiences in their current relationship as evidence on which to base their future hopes on. That is, prior experiences with goal pursuits may continually inform one's sense of hope (Snyder, 2002). For example, a couple who dated long-distance may use this prior feat as an example of how they have overcome challenges in the past, which may fuel partners' hope in overcoming future obstacles. Thus, relational hope may be an iterative process dependent on the relational experiences in daily life which influence relational hope over the longer-term.

4 | THE POWER OF WILLS, WAYS, AND WISHES: A PROPOSED MODEL OF RELATIONAL HOPE

The opening example of couple Jenna and Jordan may resonate with the way many couples approach their relationship. Presently, however, there is not a model that integrates an understanding of how hope functions in interpersonal relationships that also addresses a future-oriented component of hope. Accordingly, our expanded model of relational hope augments the Snyder et al. (1991) model of general hope, presenting three facets that capture internal sources of hope geared specifically toward relational goals. In formulating this model of hope, we draw on the two key facets of hope presented by Snyder et al. (1991)—hope agency and hope pathways—now orienting them externally (Aspinwall & Leaf, 2002) towards relational goals involving a romantic partner. We further expand previous models of hope by including a new facet called relational aspirations that captures both the future-oriented and emotional component of hope.

We define relational hope as the cognitive and emotional representations of individuals' striving toward positive future outcomes in their relationship. Specifically, we present three facets of relational hope, *relational agency*, *relational pathways*, and *relational aspirations*. Collectively, these three facets help individuals pursue and attain their goals for their relationship, drawing them closer to an overall desired future. Relational agency pertains to one's *will*, or personal motivation and competency to meet relational goals. Relational pathways are an individual's *ways*, or the perception of having multiple routes and strategies toward desired relational goals. Finally, the facet exclusive to the relational hope model is relational aspirations: one's *wishes*, or positive emotions when anticipating or envisioning future relational goals. Relational aspirations represent the emotional pull that hopeful individuals feel toward the future of their relationship. Importantly, while positive emotions are seen as a consequence of agency and pathways in the general hope model (Snyder et al., 1991), the positive emotional facet captured by relational aspirations in the current model plays a concurrent role with agency and pathways in shaping relational goal pursuit. In other words, along with relational agency and pathways, relational aspirations are another factor that simultaneously drive relational goal pursuit and attainment.

In total, relational agency, relational pathways, and relational aspirations help individuals meet the goals they set for their relationship. Over time, the accumulation of successful goal pursuits by hopeful individuals translates into greater overall well-being (Lee & Gallagher, 2018). Accordingly, our new model of relational hope, including its three core facets and proposed benefits to well-being in romantic relationships, is depicted in Figure 1. In the next section we describe how each facet of relational hope may promote key cognitive and motivational mechanisms that help sustain and promote relationships.

4.1 | Relational agency promotes relationship quality via approach goals

Those who have a strong sense of relational agency may promote high quality relationships for themselves and their partners. Previous research has indicated that those high in general hope endorse more positive feelings about their social relationships and are more satisfied with their interpersonal life (Chang, 1998; Segrin & Taylor, 2007). However, the majority of such research has not distinguished between which facets of hope most strongly predict interpersonal

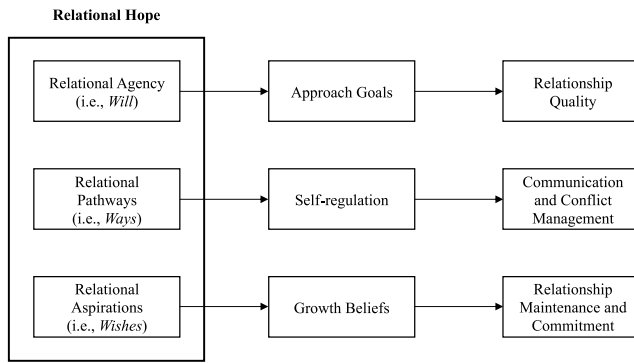


FIGURE 1 The three facets of relational hope and their proposed relationship benefits

outcomes. In the current work, we posit that the agency facet of hope is linked to greater relationship quality. Specifically, relational agency may promote more opportunities for relationship partners to connect with one another and enhance relationship quality. For example, higher state levels of hope agency prompt greater feelings of connection to others across a week-long period, demonstrating how energization toward goal attainment can extend to fulfilling our needs for belongingness (Merolla et al., 2021). Thus, the relational agency facet of hope should promote greater relationship quality.

We further posit that those high in relational agency may have high relationship quality because they are oriented toward social approach goals that benefit their relationship. Social approach goals focus on moving toward positive relationship outcomes or incentives (Elliot et al., 2006; Gable & Impett, 2012), such as wanting to engage in novel experiences to bond with a partner or spend quality time together (Gable & Gosnell, 2013; Impett & Gordon, 2010). Hope is guided by a framework of approaching positive outcomes to a greater extent than avoiding negative outcomes (Snyder, 1994; Snyder et al., 1997). Thus, we propose that relational agency may prompt the use of social approach goals because feeling agentic, efficacious, and confident in one's abilities to achieve desired outcomes fuels an approach orientation (Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliot & Reis, 2003). Therefore, when individuals are relationally agentic and are empowered to achieve their relationship goals, a mindset of approaching positives may motivate them to behave in ways that promote high-quality relationships.

Social approach goals promote positive outcomes for relationships, including greater intimacy and affiliation (Gable, 2006). For example, approach-motivated sacrifices, as well as perceived approach-motivated sacrifices from one's partner, promote greater relationship quality and less conflict among couples in daily life (Impett et al., 2005). The benefits of approach motives in relationships extend to other behaviors as well. Engaging in touch from an approach orientation produces benefits in relationship quality for both relationship members (Jakubiak et al., 2021). Given that individuals who feel agentic in their relationship may be more likely to pursue approach goals as a means to desired relationship outcomes, they are more likely to engage in beneficial behaviors that promote greater relationship quality both for themselves and their partner. Our theoretical model for the relationship benefits of relational agency is depicted in Figure 1.

4.2 | Relational pathways promote communication and conflict management through effective self-regulation

A primary way that relational pathways benefit relationships is by helping partners communicate and resolve conflict. In general, hopeful individuals are less likely to experience conflict (Merolla et al., 2021). When conflict does arise, however, those high in pathways may be better at finding and implementing positive solutions in arguments and restoring balance in the relationship. For example, hopeful individuals engage in accommodation during couples'

conflict (Merolla, 2017; Merolla & Harman, 2018), which is one way to understand constructive conflict management (Rusbult et al., 1991). Specifically, hopeful individuals disengage from self-interested and destructive behavior during conflict (e.g., withdrawal, negative attacks; Merolla, 2014) and instead engage in more active and pro-relationship behavior (e.g., emphasizing collaboration and fairness, integrative problem-solving; Merolla, 2014, 2017). Pathways are a key facet of hope in promoting effective communication and conflict resolution because having multiple pathways can help the individual re-route their course of action during conflict to promote resolutions and positive ways forward in the relationship.

We further argue that relational pathways promote communication and conflict resolution because individuals who perceive multiple pathways toward goals have an enhanced capacity for self-regulation. Broadly defined, self-regulation refers to the ability to change one's thoughts, feelings, and actions in line with desired goals (Inzlicht et al., 2021; Luchies et al., 2011; Scholer et al., 2018). In the context of couples' conflict, it has been noted that hope may promote the ability to self-regulate (Merolla, 2017). Pathways may be an important component in self-regulation because it involves the perception of multiple successful routes to reach one's goals (Snyder, 2002; Snyder et al., 1991), which presents many opportunities or courses of action to regulate one's behavior. Although perceiving multiple means to reach one's goals can decrease the dependency and commitment to those means due to increased substitutability (Bélanger et al., 2015; Kruglanski et al., 2011), research suggests that hopeful individuals follow one primary strategy when pursuing a goal (Snyder, 2002), but can flexibly use alternative routes when needed (Vohs & Schmeichel, 2002). In relationships then, perceiving multiple pathways toward desired relationship goals may be an important factor to help individuals self-regulate toward better communication when encountering conflict in their relationship.

During relationship conflict, partners may desire a happy and satisfying relationship, but a current state of tension or disagreement may threaten that desired state. Self-regulation can help couples adjust their behavior toward their partner to effectively communicate in order to overcome the issue at hand and restore their relationship (Carver & Scheier, 1998, 2016; Inzlicht et al., 2021). It has been recognized that self-regulation may be key for the transformation of motivation from the self to the interest of the relationship during accommodation (Merolla, 2017; Merolla & Harman, 2018). Indeed, when self-regulatory strength is depleted, people are less able to accommodate by responding with constructive, relationship-enhancing behavior (Finkel & Campbell, 2001). Furthermore, the inability to properly self-regulate has consequences for the partner, as failure to self-regulate is linked to destructive behaviors and interactions (Finkel et al., 2009). Overall, this research indicates that an individual's ability to engage in effective self-regulation during conflict is crucial for an actor to inhibit destructive tendencies and restore the relationship. Accordingly, the possession of hope pathways to generate multiple routes of action during conflict may be an important precursor to the ability to self-regulate, thereby promoting more overall positive communication and conflict management strategies that benefit both relationship members. Our theoretical model for the relationship benefits of relational pathways is depicted in Figure 1.

4.3 | Relational aspirations support relationship maintenance and commitment through growth beliefs

Relational aspirations may benefit relationships through strengthening commitment and aiding relationship maintenance over time. Specifically, feeling positively when envisioning future relationship outcomes may fuel individuals' commitment to that relationship and prompt them to enact specific behaviors to help maintain that relationship. Previous research has found that hopeful individuals are more likely to engage in relationship talk (Merolla, 2014) which involves being open in discussing the nature of their relationship, a behavior that is important for relational maintenance (Stafford, 2011). In particular, we posit that the aspirations facet is important for understanding hope's association with commitment and relationship maintenance because positive feelings towards what can be attained in the future may motivate individuals toward persistence. Indeed, previous research has found that how people anticipate their relationship will be in the future is an important marker of commitment and satisfaction in that relationship

(Baker et al., 2017; Lemay, 2016). Similarly then, relational aspirations and positive feelings toward future relationship outcomes may promote relationship maintenance behaviors and foster greater commitment.

We further posit that the reason why having relational aspirations can promote maintenance and commitment is because individuals may adopt growth beliefs about their relationship to bring them closer to their desired future. Growth beliefs are knowledge structures about what constitutes success in a relationship, incorporating ideas such as how relationships evolve through overcoming challenges and enhancing closeness over time (Knee, 1998; Knee et al., 2003; Knee & Petty, 2013). Relational aspirations may promote the endorsement of relationship growth beliefs because positive emotions can broaden our mindsets by promoting more open, flexible, and creative thinking (Fredrickson, 2001). Specifically, feelings of hopefulness and envisioning future achievements are said to broaden the thought-action repertoire by planning for a better future (Fredrickson, 2013). One way that relational aspirations may broaden our mindsets is through holding growth beliefs, that relationships are cultivated over time, which can promote the resiliency of the relationship (Fredrickson, 2001). Therefore, if an individual derives positive emotions from thinking about the future with their partner, this might broaden their mindset in understanding how relationships grow across time, which promotes positive behaviors in ways that realizes their wishes.

There is well-documented evidence to support the association between growth beliefs and relationship maintenance and commitment. Individuals who hold growth beliefs are motivated for continuous improvement in their relationships (Knee & Petty, 2013). Specifically, growth beliefs may promote a tendency toward self-regulation in their relationship (Burnette et al., 2013) where individuals strive to attain mastery and flexibility in managing situations with their partner across time (Knee & Petty, 2013). Accordingly, those who hold growth beliefs perceive relationships as being shaped over time (as opposed to being “meant to be”), which promotes their engagement in behaviors to help maintain the relationship (Weigel et al., 2016). Furthermore, growth beliefs help strengthen individual's commitment to their relationship (Dailey et al., 2019) and ward off relationship dissolution strategies such as ghosting (Freedman et al., 2019). In summary, for individuals who feel positively in anticipating the future of their relationship, they may utilize growth beliefs as a guiding framework for approaching their relationship, which helps them regulate behavior in a way that benefits the maintenance of the relationship over time. Our theoretical model for the relationship benefits of relational aspirations is depicted in Figure 1.

5 | POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES OF RELATIONAL HOPE

Despite the proposed benefits of hope for romantic relationships, it is important to understand contexts under which hope may hurt relationships. One challenge for couples could arise if they have different levels of relational agency, pathways, and aspirations for relational goals (Snyder, 1994). For example, if one partner is more agentic in their relationship, they may feel they are the only one to consistently put in effort in making the relationship work. Alternatively, a partner higher in pathways may be the one who disproportionately finds ways to compromise or resolve conflict. Additionally, a partner higher in aspirations might feel discouraged if their partner does not feel positively about possible future endeavors together. Furthermore, given that relational goals are influenced by both members of a relationship, the more hopeful member of the relationship may be compromised in their ability to achieve these goals if their partner is less hopeful. Indeed, from an interdependence perspective, partners must support one another in goal pursuits to attain success (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008), and even adjust their goals for one another (Gere & Impett, 2018). Therefore, it may be crucial to understand how a match or mismatch in levels of relational hope between partners impacts relationship outcomes and the long-term trajectory of the relationship. Understanding the dyadic construction of relational hope and how it may backfire when couples are misaligned in their levels of relational hope is a crucial area for further investigation.

Another potential downside of relational hope could arise when couples persist in their hope in a problematic context (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). Having high hope does not necessitate the pursuit of *adaptive* goals (Cheavens et al., 2019; Snyder et al., 2002), meaning that hopeful individuals could pursue goals that end up

hurting themselves or their partners. For example, there could be considerable harm for an individual who has relational hope despite their partner displaying toxic or abusive behaviors. In this case, hope that the partner will change or that the relationship will improve may be maladaptive and jeopardize the well-being of the hopeful individual (Crapolicchio et al., 2021). Indeed, in situations like this, one's hope may not be justified, and it may be best to abandon certain relational goals or even end the relationship (Merolla, 2017). Accordingly, if an individual's relational hope becomes so extreme as to become biased—such as through motivated cognition (Higgins & Spiegel, 2004; Lemay & Clark, 2015) or positive illusions (Murray et al., 1996) that become excessive and unrealistic—individuals may persist in a relationship when their hope is unfounded or unsupported by the reality of their situation. Understanding how and when relational hope can be maladaptive, such as when preventing individuals from disengaging from unhealthy relationships, or when it may be beneficial to relinquish hope, remain important areas for future study.

6 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR HOPE RESEARCH

Given the present considerations, there is a lot of promise in studying the role of relational hope for couples' well-being. One important first step entails validating the proposed model of relational hope. Generating a new, valid measure of relational hope, including the three facets of agency, pathways, and aspirations as targeted at a relationship and partner, will be important for testing new theoretical ideas. Researchers presently interested in a measure of hope in relationships may turn to sources that have adapted items from the general hope model to fit the relationship context (Merolla, 2014; Merolla & Harman, 2018). In addition, a new measure capturing the proposed three-facet relational hope model including relational aspirations (e.g., *I feel excited when I imagine what my future might look like with my partner*) is currently being developed using item response theory (Hambleton et al., 1991) to provide a validated measure with maximally informative items (Shimshock & Le, 2022). Accordingly, both lay perspectives and existing theoretical perspectives on hope will be incorporated in constructing a measure applicable for romantic couples.

Although we have proposed relational hope as an individual difference variable, there are also important partner and relationship level influences in the development of hope. Thus, relational hope should be studied in a dyadic context, understanding how external factors influence intrapersonal levels of hope. This will help illuminate how hope functions socially in a relationship by examining both an actor and partner's effect on one another's relational hope. Relatedly, research on hope has focused on the individual's striving for personal goals; however, our interpersonal relationships also influence how we create, pursue, and monitor our progress toward our goals (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010). Therefore, for relational goals, it may be especially important to consider the interactive effects between partners' relational hope when predicting relationship-relevant cognitions, motivations, outcomes, and overall goal attainment. Additionally, longitudinal designs, such as dyadic daily experience studies, would allow researchers to examine hope in daily contexts to help elucidate how both chronic and daily levels of hope shape costs and benefits to well-being over time.

Future studies may also examine how an individual can boost their relational hope, or how partners may promote one another's hope. For example, individuals may use memorable messages, or key messages we carry with us that impact our choices in life, to influence hopeful thinking (Merolla et al., 2017). In addition, relationship partners may engage in hope communication (Merolla & Kam, 2018) to bolster their partner's levels of relational agency, pathways, and aspirations, or hopeful scaffolding to help a partner envision desired relational goals (Callina et al., 2018). Alternatively, partners may project their level of hope onto their partner which could benefit the relationship should this create self-fulfilling prophecies of hope (Lemay et al., 2007). Specific ways individuals and their partners bolster relational hope in one another is key in understanding how to promote hope for romantic couples.

Finally, we have focused on three core outcomes linked to each facet of relational hope but recognize that hope may have wide-ranging effects on the self, partner, and relationship. Thus, it will be important to examine how the facets of relational hope predict other relationship costs and benefits, and through other potential mechanisms. Relatedly, it will also be important to understand how the three facets of hope work together to promote individual and relational cognitions and motivations that help shape relationship outcomes. As proposed in hope theory, agency and pathways work together in an iterative process to produce positive outcomes (Snyder et al., 1991), which could also be the case for the three facets of relational hope. For example, perhaps having relational aspirations is beneficial only to the extent that couple members are also equipped with agency and pathways to bring them closer to their desired future. Examining the interactive effects between the three facets of hope will likely provide many insights into how hope benefits relationships.

7 | CONCLUSION

Our relationships with others, including romantic partners, are part of what make our lives meaningful. Thus, how we sustain these relationships is of great importance to researchers, and we believe that relational hope may be one positive resource for couples, helping promote positive behaviors in their relationship now and into the future. The study of relational hope can shed insight into which couples feel effective in their abilities to promote positive relationship outcomes, through good times and bad, and which couples feel helpless about effecting positive change in their relationship. Overall, we believe relational hope to be a valuable factor in promoting the resilience of romantic couples in making progress toward realizing their desired futures. Specifically, relational agency, pathways, and aspirations can promote high quality relationships, effective communication and conflict management, and relationship maintenance over time. Importantly, examining the contexts under which hope may hurt individual and relational well-being will also be essential for understanding how to effectively approach fostering relational hope in couples. Future directions such as examining relational hope in a dyadic context may help further solidify how having the will, finding the ways, and wishes for the future can provide relationship benefits for couples in their daily lives and over the long term.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Although both hope and optimism pertain to positive future expectancies, research has supported a distinction between the two. For example, optimists believe that positive outcomes can be obtained through a variety of factors, both internal and external (e.g., the self, luck, other people); in contrast, hope specifies the individual's own agency and pathways as the key means for goal attainment (Bryant & Cvengros, 2004). Importantly, and underscoring their distinct nature, empirical research has found that hope and optimism contribute differentially to well-being outcomes (Alarcon et al., 2013; Gallagher & Lopez, 2009). Relatedly, relational hope can be distinguished from positive illusions in relationships (Murray et al., 1996; Murray & Holmes, 1997). Although hopeful individuals demonstrate a slight positive bias (Snyder, 2002), they adjust their expectations for positive outcomes based on feedback from the environment and previous life experience (Feldman et al., 2009; Snyder, 2002; Vohs & Schmeichel, 2002). This is distinct from positive illusions which may actually intensify when doubts appear in the relationship (Murray et al., 1996).

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