



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jespFeeling known predicts relationship satisfaction[☆]Juliana Schroeder^{a,*}, Ayelet Fishbach^b^a University of California Berkeley Haas School of Business, 2220 Piedmont Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA^b University of Chicago Booth School of Business, 5807 S Woodlawn Avenue, Chicago, IL 60637, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Relationship satisfaction
 Relationship knowledge
 Motivation
 Support
 Well-being
 Happiness

ABSTRACT

Two forms of subjective relationship knowledge—the belief that one is known and knows one's partner—have separately been shown to positively predict relationship satisfaction, but which is more important for relational wellbeing? Seven studies show that believing one *is known* by their partner (i.e., “feeling known”) predicts relationship satisfaction more than believing that one *knows* their partner (i.e., “felt knowing”). In Studies 1a-c, feeling known predicted relationship satisfaction more than felt knowing among family, romantic partners, and friends. Feeling known also causally influenced expected relationship satisfaction more than felt knowing in Studies 2a-b. Study 3 suggests a potential reason why feeling known is more closely associated with relationship satisfaction – because people value receiving support in their relationships. Finally, the desire to feel known may lead people to “undersell” themselves to potential partners. In Study 4, when people wrote dating profiles to attract potential romantic partners, they more strongly expressed their desire to be known than to know their potential future partner. Yet, readers of these profiles were more attracted to those who professed interest in knowing them. Overall, this research suggests that feeling known is an important ingredient in the recipe for relationship joy.

Developing and maintaining satisfying social relationships, whether with a family member, friend, colleague, or romantic partner, requires two types of knowledge: knowing and being known (Gottman & Porterfield, 1981; Iida et al., 2008; Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Rempel et al., 1985). As just one example, the “Fast Friends” paradigm, one of the quickest validated routes to enhancing relationship closeness (Aron et al., 1997; Catron, 2015), involves reciprocally exchanging personal information of increased intimacy, thus building knowledge and consequently relationship satisfaction. It is no surprise, then, that people spend much of their time and energy striving to know and be known by each other.

But which is more important for a person's happiness in their relationship: the belief that one *knows* their partner or the belief they *are known* by their partner? The current paper investigates the relative predictive power of these two types of subjective knowledge on relationship satisfaction. Consider the following thought experiment: Do you think it would be worse for your relationship satisfaction with your colleague if your colleague did not know your child's name or if you did not know their child's name? Perceived knowing and being known can diverge in a relationship—and, at times, dramatically. Indeed, prior

research has found that people generally believe they know others more than others know them (Pronin et al., 2001).

Anecdotes suggest that believing one *is known* may be particularly important for good relationships. As author Elizabeth Gilbert once wrote, “To be fully seen by somebody, then, and be loved anyhow—this is a human offering that can border on miraculous” (Gilbert, 2010, p. 91). According to Gilbert, while believing that you are truly known is difficult to achieve, it may well be a gold standard for a good relationship. Perhaps in the earlier thought experiment, realizing that you do not know your colleague's child would not harm your relationship satisfaction as much as realizing that your colleague does not know your child. Some prior empirical research aligns with this intuition; in their close relationships, people prefer their partners to know even their negative qualities (Swann, 1987, 1990); in their work relationships, people feel less objectified when their colleagues and employers know them better (Belmi & Schroeder, 2021); and in educational settings, teachers report greater well-being when their students know them (Spilt et al., 2011; Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). More generally, because relationship satisfaction depends on people feeling supported (e.g., in their goal pursuit: Fitzsimons et al., 2015; Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010),

[☆] This paper has been recommended for acceptance by Konstantinos Kafetsios.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104559>

Received 6 January 2023; Received in revised form 31 October 2023; Accepted 4 November 2023

Available online 9 December 2023

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the perception of being known might matter more for relationship satisfaction.

1. Two types of subjective relationship knowledge

Having a successful relationship requires knowing one another (e.g., dating partners, college roommates, Anderson et al., 2003; work colleagues, Marks et al., 2002). We focus on subjective beliefs about knowledge (i.e., the belief that you know your partner or are known by your partner) rather than objective knowledge (i.e., how well you actually know your partner or are known) because subjective measures of knowledge predict relationship satisfaction more (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009). Moreover, subjective knowledge often does not predict objective knowledge in relationships (Lemay et al., 2007).

We distinguish between two types of subjective knowledge: how well a focal individual believes their partner knows them (which we refer to as “feeling known”) and how well a focal individual believes they know their partner (which we refer to as “felt knowing”). We note that “feeling known” and “felt knowing” do not refer to affective reactions nor to behaviors, but rather to the subjective *perception* that one is known versus knowing.

Feeling known and felt knowing are not inherently symmetric. A fundamental fact of social life is that people think that they know their partners better than their partners know them (“the illusion of asymmetric insight”; Pronin et al., 2001). For example, in Pronin et al. (2001), college roommates who were asked to report how well they knew various things about their roommate (e.g., how shy, messy, and competitive they were) and how well their roommate knew the same things about them, consistently reported they knew their roommate better than their roommate knew them.

What does the illusion of asymmetric insight mean for relationship satisfaction? On the one hand, because people think they know more about others than others know about them, perhaps people likewise feel more satisfied in their relationships the more that they think they know the other person. Alternatively, it could be the little that people feel known that matters most for their relationship satisfaction. Answering the question of whether feeling known or felt knowing matters more for relationship satisfaction is important because satisfaction in one’s relationships can directly influence many consequential decisions, from deciding to get divorced (romantic relationship dissatisfaction) to leaving one’s job (work relationship dissatisfaction) to relocation (community relationship dissatisfaction).

2. The importance of feeling known for relationship satisfaction

Not surprisingly, the two types of subjective relationship knowledge (feeling known and knowing) are positively correlated and each has been associated with greater relationship satisfaction. For example, among newlywed couples, subjectively feeling that one understands and is understood by one’s partner predicted relationship well-being (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009). Yet, to the extent that the desire to feel supported in one’s goal pursuit underlies relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010), we hypothesize that feeling known—a precursor to feeling supported—is a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than the feeling of knowing a partner. Indeed, although people do enjoy providing support to their partners (Orehek & Forest, 2016), they particularly value partners who support *them*. People feel grateful when others help them, are more attracted to supportive partners, and stay in their relationships longer when they find their partner to be more supportive of them (Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Debrot et al., 2012; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Maisel & Gable, 2009; Otto et al., 2015; Righetti et al., 2020). Because the perception of receiving support enables relationship satisfaction, we predict that feeling known by one’s partner, which is necessary for feeling supported, will likewise enhance relationship satisfaction.

Although prior research has not set to examine the relative predictive

power of feeling known versus knowing a partner on relationship satisfaction, we point to several prior findings that underscore the hypothesized close link between feeling known and satisfaction. First, people prefer social interactions in which their self-conceptions (their thoughts and feelings about themselves) are confirmed by others (self-verification theory, Swann, 1983). This demand can even override the desire for self-enhancement: when people have negative self-views, they choose interaction partners who appraise them unfavorably instead of favorably (Seih et al., 2013; Swann et al., 1992).

Second, people who are better able to express their true self-concept in their interactions with others like their romantic partners more and form closer relationships with them (Bargh et al., 2002). On the flip side, self-concealment from one’s partner—reducing feeling known—is associated with lower relationship satisfaction and commitment (Uysal et al., 2012).

Third, even in non-romantic relationships, feeling known is associated with greater liking. In one set of experiments, individuals paired with novel partners who asked more (vs. fewer) questions of them felt more known and liked their partners more (Huang et al., 2017). In a different type of relationship—children’s relationships with their parents—keeping secrets from parents predicted negative adolescent well-being (Frijns et al., 2005).

While the close association between feeling known by a partner and having greater relationship satisfaction with them has been established, our hypothesis of the primacy of feeling known for satisfaction was not. It may even seem surprising because it flies in the face of some alternative results. For one, from an evolutionary perspective, knowing the “quality” of a relationship partner might be more critical for choosing a relationship than being known (Miller & Todd, 1998). Further, according to the actor-observer bias (Jones & Nisbett, 1987), people make internal attributions for others’ actions (and external attributions for their own actions), which makes it more critical that they know others’ fixed traits (which predict others’ behavior) than that others know the self’s malleable traits (which do not predict the self’s behavior).

Moreover, it has been shown that relationship satisfaction can increase when people provide support to a partner (i.e., are instrumental for their partner’s goals) not just when they receive support (Orehek & Forest, 2016), but this research did not compare the *relative* predictive power of providing versus receiving support on relationship satisfaction. For another, actually providing instrumental support to a relationship partner, more so than receiving it, has been associated with individual and relational longevity (Brown et al., 2003) and potential benefits for the giver (Knoll et al., 2007). Thus, it may be “better to give than receive” when it comes to the wellbeing of the giver versus receiver (Aknin et al., 2013; Aknin et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2008). However, we argue that even if receiving actual support is worse for the individual than providing actual support, the *perception* of being supported in one’s relationship (vs. providing support) is likely to be better for a person’s *subjective* satisfaction in that relationship.

3. Present research

Our primary prediction is that feeling known by one’s partner predicts relationship satisfaction more strongly than does feeling that one knows one’s partner. Thus, despite people’s tendency to feel they know more than are known (the illusion of asymmetric insight, Pronin et al., 2001), it is the little they feel known that matters more for their satisfaction. Moreover, we hypothesize that feeling known might even *causally* enhance satisfaction more than felt knowing. We expect this effect will occur in both close relationships (e.g., with one’s spouse) and more distant relationships (e.g., with a new friend).

Second, we propose that the importance of feeling supported underlies the predicted stronger effect of feeling known (vs. knowing) on satisfaction. Most people want relationship partners who will support them (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010). Yet, in the less frequent cases when a person does *not* feel a strong need for support in a given relationship,

feeling known should not be more associated with satisfaction than knowing. One obvious such example is parents' relationships with their young children, where it is atypical for children to support their parents. In such a case, we could predict that parents' sense that they are known would not be more associated with relationship satisfaction than their feeling of knowing their children. Overall, the relative importance of feeling known (vs. felt knowing) for relationship satisfaction should be moderated by whether receiving support is seen as important in the relationship.

Finally, the relative importance of feeling known has implications for how people might (wrongly) present themselves to potential partners. If people recognize that feeling known improves their relationship satisfaction, people may emphasize their desire to be known more than their desire to know a potential relationship partner. But doing so would be a mistake given that potential partners are unlikely to find this appealing. They too want a relationship partner that knows them. An example comes from online dating profiles: our theory predicts that profile writers will tend to express how much they want to be known by, more than how much they want to know, a potential partner. But partners will be more attracted to those who want to know them than by those who want to be known. This could create friction in the matching process, reducing the likelihood of a successful romantic match.

We test these hypotheses in seven studies summarized in Table 1 ($N = 2036$).

Research methods. We report all data exclusions, manipulations, and measures in each study. In an effort to have enough statistical power to identify a medium-to-large effect size, studies conducted earlier in time used a stopping rule of 50 participants per experimental condition

Table 1
Summary of studies.

Study Number	Relationship Type	Main Findings
Study 1a	Relationships with siblings and parents	Feeling known by a sibling or parent more strongly predicted relationship satisfaction than feeling like one knows one's sibling or parent.
Study 1b	Relationships with romantic partners	Feeling known by a romantic partner more strongly predicted relationship satisfaction than feeling like one knows one's partner.
Study 1c	Relationships with friends	People were more satisfied in relationships in which they mainly felt known than in relationships in which they mainly felt that they knew their partner.
Study 2a	Relationships with friends (imagined)	People expected that feeling unknown by a friend would reduce relationship satisfaction more than feeling not knowing.
Study 2b	Relationships with acquaintances (imagined)	People expected that feeling known (vs. unknown) by an acquaintance would increase their relationship satisfaction more than feeling like they know (vs. do not know) the acquaintance.
Study 3	Relationships that are high or low in received or provided support	Feeling known was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than felt knowing for relationships high in received support, high in provided support, and low in provided support – but not for relationships low in received support.
Study 4	Relationships with intended romantic partners	Dating profiles expressed a desire to be known (more than a desire to know) a potential romantic partner. Potential partners preferred someone who wanted to know them (more than someone who wanted to be known).

(Studies 2a and 2b) and studies conducted later in time used a stopping rule of 100 participants per condition (Studies 1a-c, 3, 4, S3 and S4). We preregistered several of the later studies (Studies 1a, 1c, 3, and 4); the preregistration links can be found in each of the relevant study descriptions below. We also report four more supplemental studies in the Supplemental Materials, which can be found on the Open Science Foundation along with our data, analysis code, and study materials at <https://osf.io/zq4r5>. Finally, our research was approved by the University of California Berkeley's Institutional Review Board (#2017-05-9946).

4. Studies 1a-c: family, romantic, and friend relationships

Our initial studies test whether feeling known is a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than felt knowing. We tested our hypothesis using some of the most important relationships that people have: relationships with parents and siblings (Study 1a), with romantic partners (Study 1b), and with friends (Study 1c). Studies 1a and 1b first examine our hypothesis using a correlational paradigm, whereas 1c includes an experimental manipulation (and conceptually replicates the same correlational result).

4.1. Study 1a: relationships with family

4.1.1. Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan at: <https://aspredicted.org/4qz8m.pdf>.

Participants. We predetermined to recruit 100 individuals in each of four relationship-partner conditions, as we did not expect that there would be meaningful variance in our effects between the relationship partners. We told participants that “in order to participate in this study, you must have relationships (i.e., at least one substantive conversation in the past year) with your (living) mother, (living) father, and an adult sibling (18 years and older).” Participants who reported “yes” to the question: “Do you currently have relationships with all three family members?” were allowed to continue the survey. Participants who selected “no” left the survey and were not included in the analysis ($n = 32$). For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. The final analysis contained 406 individuals ($M_{age} = 33.57$ years, $SD = 8.87$; 230 male, 175 female, 1 non-binary; 287 White) who completed the survey on MTurk in exchange for \$0.40.

Study design. There were four between-participants conditions manipulating the family member about whom participants responded—mother, father, brother, sister—and two within-participants conditions that measured participants' type of relationship knowledge: *feeling known* by one's family member versus *felt knowing* of one's family member.

Assignment to experimental condition. We first assigned participants to either the parent or sibling condition. In the sibling condition, we asked: “Do you have an adult sister or an adult brother? If you have both (or more than one adult sister or brother), please select one sibling to answer questions about in this survey.” (Brother / Sister / Neither). Participants who selected “neither” left the survey; we did not include them in the analysis ($n = 4$). We assigned participants to either the brother or sister condition depending on their response. In the parent condition, we randomly assigned participants to either the mother or father condition. We subsequently confirmed that participants indeed had a relationship in their assigned family member condition; 4 more participants reported at that point that they did not have a relationship and were excluded from the analysis. In total, we analyzed 103 participants in the mother condition, 99 participants in the father condition, 110 in the brother condition, and 94 in the sister condition.

Procedure. To measure *feeling known*, we asked participants, “How accurately does your [mother / father / brother / sister] know the following about you?” on six items ($\alpha = .91$): 1) Knows my opinion on daily events; 2) Knows my mood at any given moment; 3) Knows my life

goals; 4) Knows my feelings about my other relationships (e.g., with friends); 5) Knows my preferences whenever I make a choice; 6) Knows what I'm really thinking when I say something." (1 = My [mother / father / brother / sister] does not know this (i.e., never knows the right answer), 4 = My [mother / father / brother / sister] knows this somewhat well (i.e., knows the right answer sometimes), 7 = My [mother / father / brother / sister] knows this perfectly (i.e., always knows exactly the right answer). To measure *felt knowing*, we asked, "How accurately do you know the following about your [mother / father / brother / sister]?" on the same six items with the same scale ($\alpha = .92$). We compiled these items from other previously validated scales examining inferences of mental states (e.g., Ickes, 2001).

To measure *relationship satisfaction*, we asked three items ($\alpha = .94$) that we believed would capture face-valid assessments of the strength of a relationship: how good, close, and warm the relationship was (on 7-point Likert scales with the endpoints: *very bad to very good*; *very distant to very close*; and *very cold to very warm*). We selected these items because they are direct, simple, and would apply to multiple types of relationships (e.g., family, friend, romantic, and work relationships) that we measure in later studies (e.g., Studies 1c and 3).

As control variables, we asked participants to report: "Is your relationship with your [mother / father / brother / sister] important to you?" (Yes / No), the age of their [mother / father / brother / sister] (free response), and whether their [mother / father / brother / sister] is a biological parent or sibling, step-parent or -sibling, or "other" (Biological / Step- / Other). In our sample, 96.56% reported about a biological relationship, 2.71% reported about a step-relationship, and the remaining 0.74% reported about an adopted relationship.

4.1.2. Results

Regressing relationship satisfaction on feeling known and felt knowing, controlling for family member condition (with each condition dummy-coded 0 or 1), we found that *feeling known* predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .59, p < .001$) more than *felt knowing* ($\beta = .18, p = .001$). In support of the hypothesis, the beta coefficient in the model for feeling known was statistically larger than the coefficient for felt knowing, $z = 5.33, p < .001$. Fig. 1 depicts this result using a partial regression plot that shows the standardized residual of feeling known and felt knowing on relationship satisfaction, controlling for knowing and known, respectively, to isolate the unique effect of each variable on satisfaction. As can be seen in Fig. 1, the association between feeling known and relationship satisfaction (controlling for felt knowing) is stronger than the association between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction (controlling for feeling known).¹ Additionally controlling for participants' age and gender, the family member's age, whether the relationship was important, and whether the family relationship was biological did not meaningfully change the results. The full regression output can be found in the Supplemental Materials for interested readers (Table S1). As preregistered, we further found that feeling known was a stronger predictor than felt knowing for each family relationship separately (see analyses in Supplemental Materials).

While not the focus of our analyses, it is worth noting that the illusion of asymmetric insight emerged in these data: participants believed that they knew the family member ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.33$) better than the family member knew them ($M = 4.50, SD = 1.37$), *paired t*(201) = 4.32, $p < .001, d = 0.22$. This was true for each family relationship separately, *paired ts* > 2.65, $ps < .010$.

Tests for multicollinearity. Feeling known and felt knowing were

highly correlated across all family members, $r = .76, p < .001$, and each positively correlated with relationship satisfaction (feeling known: $r = .73, p < .001$; knowing: $r = .62, p < .001$).² One possible concern with our results is that, because feeling known and felt knowing are highly correlated, including both in a regression model may introduce multicollinearity that could create unstable parameter estimates. To examine whether multicollinearity exists in our models, we computed two collinearity statistics: the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance statistic. Statisticians suggest that parameter estimates may be unstable if the VIF exceeds 10 and tolerance is below 0.1 (Hair et al., 1995). In our models, the VIF was 2.46, indicating that the variance of the estimated coefficients is inflated by a factor of 2.46 because of the correlation between feeling known and felt knowing, and tolerance was 0.41, indicating that 59% of the variance from feeling known is shared with felt knowing. Neither of these statistics indicate that we have particularly unstable parameter estimates.

However, to be thorough, we preregistered a separate analysis that would eliminate the possibility of multicollinearity. We examined whether the difference score between feeling known and felt knowing ($M = -0.30, SD = 0.93$; 16.0% of respondents had a difference score of 0) predicted relationship satisfaction. It did: $\beta = .17, p = .001$, again supporting the hypothesis.

In a final exploratory analysis, we considered the possibility that people might care less about getting support from their parents as they get older, in which case it might be possible that feeling known would be less closely associated with relationship satisfaction. To examine this, we included only participants who reported about their relationships with their parents ($n = 201$) and conducted a regression analysis that included felt knowing, feeling known, a dummy code variable for parent gender (1 = mom, 0 = dad), participant age, and the interactions between age and felt knowing and age and feeling known. Effects of feeling known, felt knowing, and age emerged, $ps < .013$, but there was no interaction between feeling known and respondent's age ($\beta = -.27, p = .502$) and only a weak, marginally significant interaction between felt knowing and respondent's age ($\beta = -.74, p = .067$). This lack of moderation suggests that either participants continue to value receiving support from parents across their lifespans, or that we did not have the statistical power to capture relationships with very elderly parents.

4.2. Study 1b: relationships with romantic partners

4.2.1. Method

Participants. We predetermined to collect 100 individuals in romantic relationships for our study. For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. The final analysis contained 100 individuals who reported having a current romantic relationship ($M_{age} = 31.19$ years, $SD = 9.85$; 54 female, 41 male, 5 other gender; 68 White; average relationship duration = 91.71 months, $SD = 96.70$) and completed the survey on Prolific Academic in exchange for \$0.73.

Study design. Participants reported how much knowledge they had for two types of relationship knowledge: *feeling known* by their romantic partner and *felt knowing* of their romantic partner (within-participants).

Procedure. To ensure participants were writing about real romantic relationships, we asked them to write 2–3 full sentences describing their romantic relationship ("How did you and your partner meet? How would you describe the nature of your relationship? You can talk about your relationship dynamics, how you feel about the relationship or anything else that might characterize your relationship that would be important for us to know.")

¹ In this study and all future studies, we also examined whether there was an interaction between feeling known and felt knowing on relationship satisfaction (see Model 2 in Tables S1-S3 in the Supplemental Materials for those results, and Figures S1-S3 in the Supplemental Materials for the visualization). Because the exact pattern of the interaction is not consistent across our studies, and we did not hypothesize any particular pattern, we do not discuss it further.

² The correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction ($r = .73$) was significantly stronger than between felt knowing and satisfaction ($r = .62$), $z = 4.59, p < .001$, further supporting our hypothesis. (We thank our reviewer for suggesting this analysis, and we used <http://quantpsy.org/corrttest/corrttest2.htm> to conduct it.)

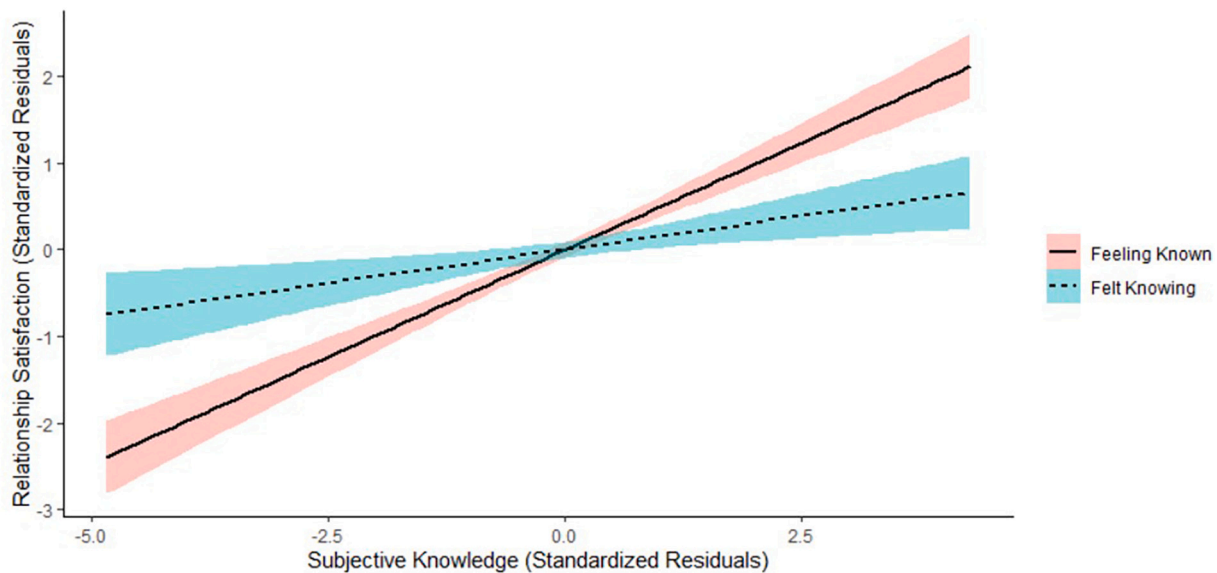


Fig. 1. Partial regression plot of the effects of feeling known (standardized residuals controlling for felt knowing) and felt knowing (standardized residuals controlling for feeling known) on the standardized residual of relationship satisfaction with family in Study 1a.

Note. Colored regions depict the 95% confidence intervals. This figure aggregates across four types of family relationships: relationships with one's mother, father, sister, and brother.

We used the same scales in Study 1a to measure *feeling known* ($\alpha = .88$) and *felt knowing* ($\alpha = .86$) except that we changed the labels to refer to the relationship partner instead of a family member. To measure relationship satisfaction, participants reported how happy (1 = *not very happy*; 7 = *very happy*) and satisfied (1 = *not very satisfied*; 7 = *very satisfied*) they felt in their current romantic relationship ($r = .88, p < .001$).

Participants also rated their expectations about how feeling known and felt knowing influences their own relationship satisfaction. They predicted “how important is each of the following for you to feel happy and satisfied in your current romantic relationship” on the same items measuring feeling known ($\alpha = .82$) and felt knowing ($\alpha = .81$; 1 = *not at all important*; 7 = *extremely important*).

At the end of the survey, participants reported their own age, gender, race, and education level as well as their partner's age, gender, race, and education level. They also reported their relationship duration in years, months, and weeks, which we converted into months for analysis.³

4.2.2. Results

Consistent with the hypothesis, when we regressed relationship satisfaction on feeling known and felt knowing, we found that *feeling known* predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .64, p < .001$) whereas *felt knowing* did not ($\beta = .03, p = .763$), and the beta coefficient for feeling known was statistically larger than the coefficient for felt knowing, $z = 3.76, p < .001$ (see Fig. 2). Additionally controlling for participants' age and gender (0 = male; 1 = female), their partner's age and gender, and the length of time they spent in the relationship in months did not meaningfully change the results.

Surprisingly, we did not find evidence for the illusion of asymmetric

³ We included two exploratory questions to measure how much participants expected support from their partner (“How much do you expect emotional support from your partner?” on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much)) and actually got support from their partner (“To what extent is your relationship with your partner characterized by them giving you emotional support?” on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much)). In general, participants expected to get a high level of support ($M = 8.33, SD = 1.71$) and reported getting a high level of support ($M = 8.16, SD = 2.05$), with no significant difference between expected and reported support, $paired\ t(99) = 0.86, p = .393, d = 0.09$.

insight in this study: Participants did not believe that they knew their romantic partner ($M = 5.79, SD = 0.89$) any more than their partner knew them ($M = 5.77, SD = 1.01$), $paired\ t(99) = 0.36, p = .722, d = 0.02$. We note that we found evidence for this illusion in all other studies where we tested for it.

Tests for multicollinearity. How much participants believed they knew their partner correlated with how much they believed their partner knew them ($r = .70, p < .001$), and both correlated with relationship satisfaction (feeling known: $r = .66, p < .001$; felt knowing: $r = .48, p < .001$ ⁴). Collinearity statistics indicated that there was not problematic multicollinearity in these models (VIF = 1.95, tolerance = 0.51). In an alternative regression model that eliminated the possibility of multicollinearity, the difference score between feeling known and knowing ($M = -0.03, SD = 0.75$; 22.0% of respondents had a difference score of 0) positively predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .33, p < .001$).

We analyzed participants' expectations about how important it is to know their partner and for their partner to know them in the Supplemental Materials. As we report in the Supplemental Materials, participants did not expect that feeling known would improve their own romantic relationship satisfaction more than felt knowing; instead, they expected the opposite. It is possible that participants are unaware of which form of relationship knowledge will make them happiest, at least when asked in this way (but see Study 4 for further examination of this possibility).

4.3. Study 1c: relationships with friends

Study 1c tests the hypothesis that feeling known is more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction than felt knowing by asking some participants to nominate a friendship in which they felt like they knew the friend more than the friend knew them, while other participants nominated a friendship in which they felt the friend knew them more than they knew the friend. Our theory predicts that the second type of friend—while perhaps rarer—should bring greater experienced

⁴ The correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction ($r = .66$) was significantly stronger than between felt knowing and satisfaction ($r = .48$), $z = 2.95, p = .003$, further supporting our hypothesis.

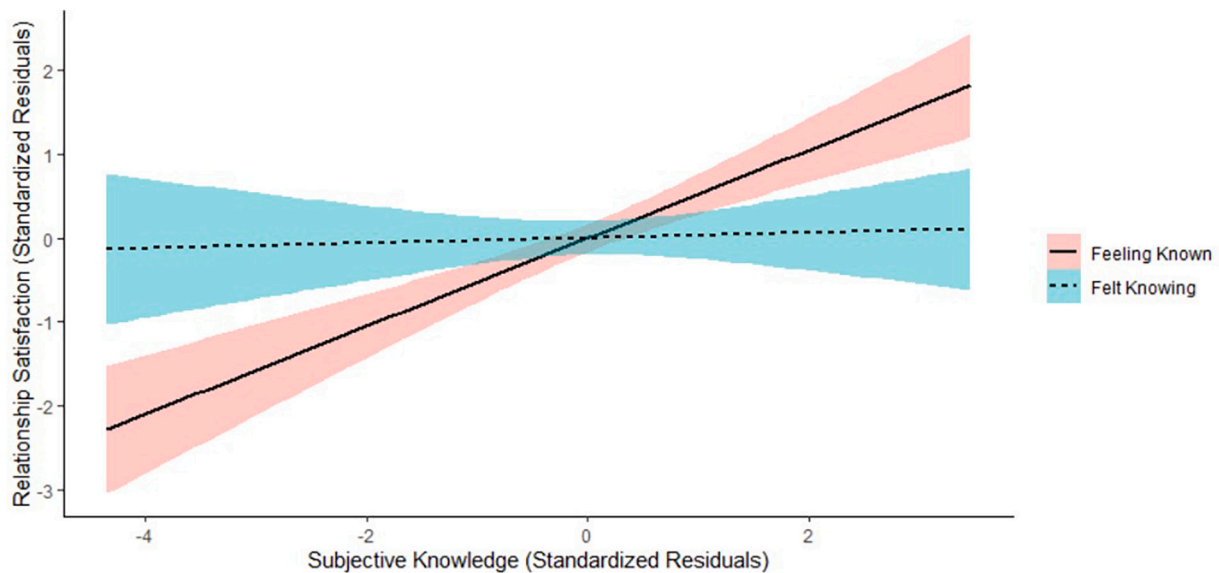


Fig. 2. Partial regression plot of the effects of feeling known (standardized residuals controlling for felt knowing) and felt knowing (standardized residuals controlling for feeling known) on standardized residual of relationship satisfaction with romantic partner in Study 1b.

Note. Colored regions depict the 95% confidence intervals.

relationship satisfaction compared to the first type of friend.

4.3.1. Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan at <https://asprected.org/zb76z.pdf>.

Participants. We predetermined a sample size of 400 participants. For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. Our final analysis contained 403 individuals ($M_{age} = 27.63$ years, $SD = 9.94$; 304 female, 94 male, 5 other gender; race not reported; average relationship duration = 82.03 months, $SD = 93.49$ months) who completed the survey on Prolific Academic in exchange for \$0.45.

Study design. Participants were assigned to one of two possible experimental conditions, the high known/low knowing or the low known/high knowing condition (between-participants). For each condition, they reported how much they (a) felt known and (b) felt like they knew their friend (within-participants).

Procedure. In the high known/low knowing condition, we told participants to think of “a friend you have who knows you well but whom you do not know well. In other words, they know you better than you know them.” In the low known/high knowing condition, we told participants to think of “a friend you have who does not know you well but whom you know well. In other words, you know them better than they know you.” Participants wrote the first name or initials of the friend.⁵ They then reported their relationship satisfaction with the friend ($\alpha = .86$) and how well they knew the friend (felt knowing; $\alpha = .87$), and how well the friend knew them (feeling known; $\alpha = .91$) using the same scales described in Study 1a. For these and all other questions, we piped in the name of the friend that they wrote, rather than using the word “friend.”

At the end of the survey, participants completed a free response item (“How would you describe the nature of your relationship with [name]?”) and several control variables measuring aspects of their relationship: the length of time in the relationship, how often they talk

⁵ One participant wrote their own Prolific ID in this box, and another participant wrote “I honestly can’t think of a friend I have like this...”. We did not preregister dropping any participants for what they wrote, so we kept them in the reported analysis, but a robustness analysis shows the results do not meaningfully change if those datapoints are removed from analysis.

(from daily to less than once per year) and the relationship type (child; romantic partner; parent; employer; employee; coworker; roommate; neighbor; sibling; grandparent; other). Last, participants reported their own age and gender.

4.3.2. Results

Experimental test. Supporting the primary hypothesis, participants reported greater relationship satisfaction in the high known/low knowing condition ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.12$) than the low known/high knowing condition ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.26$), $t(401) = 2.09$, $p = .038$, $d = 0.21$. The ratings of felt knowing and feeling known indicated that participants followed the instructions: felt knowing was higher in the low known/high knowing condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.16$) than in the high known/low knowing condition ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.25$), $t(401) = 6.05$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$, whereas feeling known was higher in the high known/low knowing condition ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.25$) than in the low known/high knowing condition ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.37$), $t(401) = 8.74$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.87$ (interaction $F(1, 401) = 300.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.43$).

We preregistered several robustness analyses. First, indicating that participants were not nominating qualitatively different types of relationships in the two different conditions, the following variables did not significantly differ by condition: the length of time participants reported knowing their friend, $t(401) = 0.40$, how often they talked, $t(401) = 0.11$, and the type of relationship, $\chi^2 < 1$, $ps > .250$. Second, suggesting that there was not differential attrition by experimental condition that could influence participants’ demographic profiles, participants’ age and gender did not significantly differ by condition, $ps > .281$. Third, the effect of the experimental condition on relationship satisfaction was robust when controlling for length of time in relationship, frequency of talking, and participant age and gender, $\beta = .12$, $p = .012$. For more details about the types of relationships that people listed, see the Supplemental Materials.

Finally, when we aggregated across the two experimental conditions, we observed evidence of the illusion of asymmetric insight such that, overall, participants reported knowing their friend ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.25$) more than their friend knew them ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.43$), $paired\ t(402) = 4.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.22$.

Correlational tests. To be thorough, we additionally examined whether feeling known was a stronger predictor than felt knowing of relationship satisfaction, ignoring the assignment to experimental

condition. When we regressed relationship satisfaction on feeling known and felt knowing, we found that *feeling known* predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) more than *felt knowing* ($\beta = .27, p < .001$), such that the beta coefficient for feeling known was directionally but not statistically significantly larger than the coefficient for felt knowing, $z = 1.55, p = .121$ (see Fig. 3). For full regression output, see Table S3 and Fig. S3. Additionally controlling for participants' age and gender, how often they talked with their friend, and the length of time they spent in the relationship in months did not change the results very much (feeling known: $\beta = .37, p < .001$; felt knowing: $\beta = .20, p < .001$; $z = 1.93, p = .054$).

As in prior studies, we examined evidence for multicollinearity. How much participants believed they knew their friend correlated with how much they believed their partner knew them ($r = .44, p < .001$), and both correlated with relationship satisfaction (feeling known: $r = .53, p < .001$; felt knowing: $r = .45, p < .001$ ⁶). Collinearity statistics indicated that there was not problematic multicollinearity in these models (VIF = 1.24, tolerance = 0.81). In an alternative regression model that eliminated the possibility of multicollinearity, the difference score between feeling known and knowing ($M = -0.29, SD = 1.43$; 4.7% of respondents had a difference score of 0) positively predicted relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .13, p = .007$).

4.3.3. Discussion

Feeling known was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than felt knowing among family members (Study 1a) and romantic partners (Study 1b). People also reported more relationship satisfaction for friends who mainly knew them, than for friends they mainly knew (Study 1c). Across studies, the primacy of feeling known for satisfaction appears robust regardless of participants' gender, age, and the length of time they had been in the relationship. The Supplemental Materials further reports two conceptual replications of Studies 1b and 1c, surveying college students about their romantic relationships (Study S1) and their friendships (Study S2), respectively.

5. Studies 2a-b: manipulating feeling (un)known

We next test whether feeling known in relationships can causally increase expected relationship satisfaction more than felt knowing of the other person. In Study 2a, we manipulated whether participants realize that an acquaintance does not know something about them (e.g., their name, their family) versus realizing that they do not know something about the acquaintance to manipulate *feeling unknown* or *feelings of not knowing*, respectively.⁷ We hypothesized that participants would expect less relationship satisfaction when they think that an acquaintance does not know them compared to when they think that they do not know the acquaintance. Study 2b then tests whether the effect of subjective knowledge level (high or low) on relationship satisfaction is larger when the participant is the target of the knowledge (and thus feels more or less known by the acquaintance) than when the acquaintance is the target of the knowledge (and thus the participant feels that they know the acquaintance more or less well).

⁶ The correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction ($r = .53$) was marginally stronger than between felt knowing and satisfaction ($r = .45$), $z = 1.82, p = .068$.

⁷ The reason we manipulated *less* subjective knowledge, rather than *more* knowledge, in Study 2a was that pilot testing showed that participants responded more strongly and found it more believable when they imagined not-knowing or feeling unknown compared to imagining the reverse. However, we used a different paradigm in Study 2b to test the full model, manipulating both the presence and absence of subjective knowledge.

5.1. Study 2a: feeling unknown vs. not knowing

5.1.1. Method

Participants. We predetermined that we would recruit 50 individuals in each of four conditions. Two participants reported having the same MTurk ID, but we kept them both in the analysis because we did not plan, a priori, to remove any duplicated MTurk IDs. For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. The final analysis contained 206 individuals ($M_{age} = 36.51$ years, $SD = 12.74$; 103 females, 102 males, 1 "other" gender; race not reported) who participated on MTurk in exchange for \$0.20.

Study design. We randomly assigned participants to one type of relationship knowledge (*feeling unknown* vs. *felt not-knowing*) and one scenario (knowledge about the person's name vs. their childhood) in a between-participants design. We used two different scenarios to increase the generalizability and robustness of results, but were not expecting to find meaningfully different results for them.

Procedure. Participants first read a scenario in which they imagined that they "ran into" someone at a party who they "would consider a 'friend.'" The participant and friend "greet warmly" and start conversing. We then manipulated subjective knowledge perceptions in two scenarios that contained different types of personal information. In the "name" scenario, someone interrupts the conversation and asks to be introduced to the participant or the friend, at which point the person responsible for the introduction realizes they do not know the other person's name. In the "childhood" scenario, either the participant or their friend asks a question about the other person's childhood which reveals their lack of knowledge of the other person. For full scenario text, see Supplemental Materials.

To measure expected relationship satisfaction, we created a face-valid set of items that we believed would capture participants' beliefs about the relationship in the scenario. Specifically, participants rated: 1) "After this experience, how distant do you feel from this person?" (reverse-scored) 2) "After this experience, how weak do you think your relationship is with this person?" (reverse-scored) 3) "Imagine that you see this person at another event later. To what extent would you want to avoid them?" (reverse-scored) 4) "After this experience, to what extent would you consider this person a 'friend?'" 5) "To what extent are you interested in improving your relationship with this person?" (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *a great deal*; $\alpha = .86$). A higher score on this scale indicates *higher* expected relationship satisfaction.

We also measured two manipulation checks: "How well do you know this person?" and "How well does this person know you?" (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very well*). They supported our manipulation; see analyses in the Supplemental Materials.

5.1.2. Results

A 2 (relationship knowledge condition: feeling unknown vs. felt not-knowing) \times 2 (scenario condition: name vs. childhood) ANOVA on relationship satisfaction supported our primary prediction: Participants expected lower relationship satisfaction with the target when the target did not know them (feeling unknown; $M = 3.92, SD = 1.27$) than when they did not know the target (felt not-knowing; $M = 4.86, SD = 1.00$), $F(1, 202) = 30.85, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.13$. This effect was qualified by an unexpected interaction with scenario condition, $F(1, 202) = 4.89, p = .028, \eta_p^2 = 0.02$, such that the effect was weaker in childhood scenario, $t(103) = 2.41, p = .018, d = 0.47$, than in the name scenario, $t(99) = 5.39, p < .001, d = 1.08$, although both effects were statistically significant. There was also a main effect of scenario such that participants felt less relationship satisfaction in the name scenario ($M = 3.73, SD = 1.11$) than the childhood knowledge scenario ($M = 5.04, SD = 0.98$), $F(1, 202) = 76.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.28$.

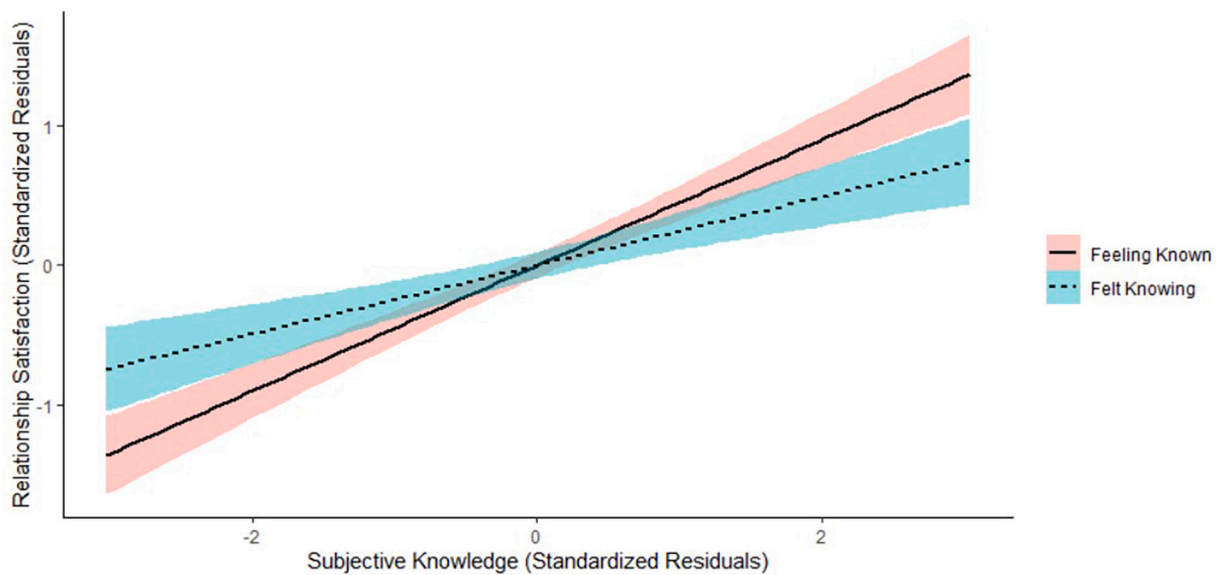


Fig. 3. Partial regression plot of the effects of feeling known (standardized residuals controlling for felt knowing) and felt knowing (standardized residuals controlling for feeling known) on standardized residual of relationship satisfaction with friend in Study 1c.

Note. Colored regions depict the 95% confidence intervals.

5.2. Study 2b: high and low levels of relationship knowledge

5.2.1. Method

Participants. We predetermined that we would recruit 50 individuals in each of eight conditions, using the same stopping rule from Study 2a. The final analysis contained 401 individuals ($M_{age} = 36.22$ years, $SD = 11.31$; 199 females, 201 males, 1 “other” gender; race not reported) who participated on MTurk in exchange for \$0.20.

Study design. We randomly assigned participants to one of eight experimental conditions in a 2 (target: knowledge related to self vs. knowledge related to partner) \times 2 (amount: high vs. low) \times 2 (scenario: name vs. family) between-participants design.

Procedure. We used similar scenario descriptions as Study 2a except that participants imagined “running into an acquaintance who you have met one time in the past.” In the name scenarios, participants read that “early in the conversation he starts to introduce you to one of his colleagues.” In the “knowledge related to self” conditions, the acquaintance either fails to remember the participant’s name (feeling unknown: “You realize that he forgot your name”) or remembers the participant’s name (feeling known: “You realize that he remembered your name”). In the “knowledge related to partner” conditions, it is instead the participant who forgets (felt not-knowing) or remembers the acquaintance’s name (felt knowing). In the family scenario conditions, the participant imagines learning that the acquaintance has a sister (knowledge related to partner) and or telling the acquaintance that they have a sister (knowledge related to self) – and in subsequent conditions, the participant either forgets that the acquaintance has a sister (felt not-knowing) or remembers (felt knowing) or the acquaintance either forgets that participant has a sister (feeling unknown) or remembers (feeling known). For full scenario text, see Supplemental Materials.⁸

We used the same relationship satisfaction scale described in Study 2a ($\alpha = .73$). We also used the same manipulation checks, which supported our manipulations with the analyses reported in the

⁸ It is possible that the felt knowing (and felt not knowing) conditions influenced beliefs not just about the participant’s own feelings of knowing, but also about whether the other person felt known. However, if anything, this possibility makes the paradigm an even more conservative test of our hypothesis.

Supplemental Materials.

5.2.2. Results

A 2 (target: knowledge related to self vs. knowledge related to partner) \times 2 (amount: high vs. low) \times 2 (scenario: name vs. family) ANOVA on relationship satisfaction supported our primary prediction, showing a target \times amount interaction, $F(1, 393) = 13.69, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.034$ (see Fig. 4). The “knowledge related to self” conditions showed a bigger effect on relationship satisfaction (feeling known: $M = 4.73, SD = 0.77$; feeling unknown: $M = 3.55, SD = 1.00$), $t(210) = 9.64, p < .001, d = 1.33$, than did the “knowledge related to partner” conditions (felt knowing: $M = 4.37, SD = 0.81$; felt not-knowing: $M = 3.87, SD = 0.99$), $t(187) = 3.79, p < .001, d = 0.55$. Another way to interpret this interaction effect is that participants in the feeling-known condition reported being significantly *higher* in relationship satisfaction than those in the felt-knowing condition, $t(202) = 3.28, p = .001, d = 0.46$, whereas participants in the feeling-unknown condition reported being significantly *lower* in relationship satisfaction than those in the felt-not-knowing condition, $t(195) = -2.27, p = .025, d = -0.33$.

The ANOVA also revealed an unsurprising main effect of relationship knowledge such that higher knowledge made participants report higher relationship satisfaction ($M = 4.55, SD = 0.81$) than lower knowledge ($M = 3.69, SD = 1.00$), $F(1, 393) = 87.44, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.182$, and an effect of the name or family scenario such that participants reported higher relationship satisfaction in the family scenarios ($M = 4.23, SD = 0.96$) than the name scenarios ($M = 4.03, SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 393) = 4.28, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = 0.011$. The main effects of knowledge relevance and all other interaction effects were statistically non-significant, $F_s < 0.35, p_s > .558, \eta_p^2_s < 0.001$.

5.2.3. Discussion

Across two different scenarios involving relationships with acquaintances, when participants imagined an acquaintance forgetting a detail about them (e.g., their name, family), they expected to feel less satisfied with the relationship than if they imagined forgetting the same detail about the acquaintance, indicating that the feeling of being known (or unknown) has a bigger impact on expected relationship satisfaction than the feeling of knowing (or not knowing). Thus, supporting the hypothesis, more subjective knowledge increased (expected) relationship satisfaction when the knowledge was related to the self (i.e., feeling

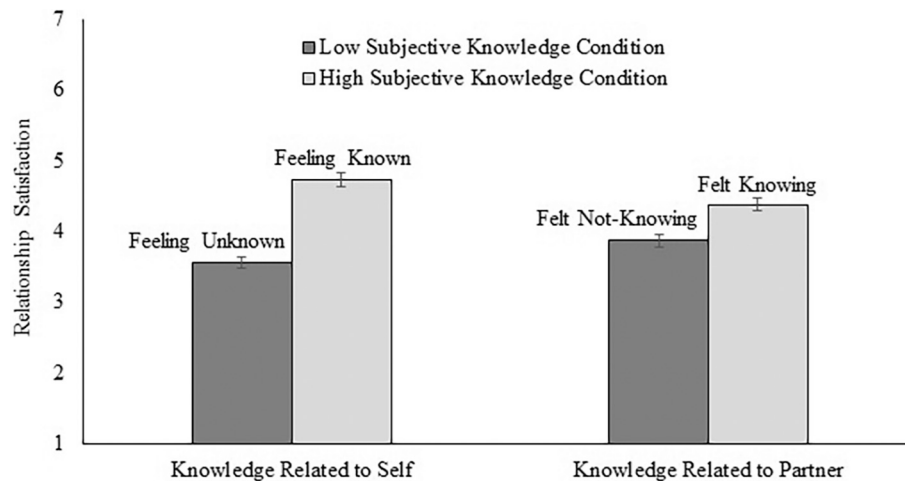


Fig. 4. Relationship satisfaction by experimental condition in Study 2b. Error bars represent ± 1 standard error around the mean.

known), but not as strongly when it was related to the partner (i.e., felt knowing). These studies identify the causal effect of knowledge type on presumed satisfaction in a relationship.

6. Study 3: seeking support moderates the effect of relationship knowledge

We proposed that feeling known predicts relationship satisfaction more strongly than felt knowing because of the role that perceived emotional support plays in relationship satisfaction. The feeling of receiving support is critical for satisfaction in a relationship. This suggests a moderator: in relationships in which people tend not to receive support – infrequent though they may be – feeling known might not predict satisfaction more than felt knowing. A paradigmatic example is parents' relationships with their children, whereby parents do not usually seek support and thus, we would hypothesize that how known they feel by their children would not meaningfully influence their relationship satisfaction.

To test this hypothesis in Study 3, we asked participants to nominate relationships characterized by high or low received or provided support (four types of relationships total) and measured how much participants felt known, felt that they knew their relationship partner, and reported satisfaction with the relationship. While we still expected that, overall, feeling known would predict relationship satisfaction more than felt knowing, this effect might be moderated by the extent to which a relationship was characterized as high or low on received support (but unaffected by the extent to which the relationship was characterized as high or low on provided support).

6.1. Method

We preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan at <https://aspred.icted.org/g2y4n.pdf>.

Participants. As preregistered, we recruited 200 participants from Prolific Academic. For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. The final analysis contained 200 individuals ($M_{age} = 31.23$ years, $SD = 12.14$; 137 female, 57 male, 6 other gender; 119 White) who participated in exchange for \$1.80 each.

Study design. Participants nominated four different relationship partners in a 2 (received support: high vs. low) \times 2 (provided support: high vs. low) within-participants experimental design. For each relationship, they rated how much they felt known by the relationship partner and felt that they knew the relationship partner (within-participants).

Procedure. Participants nominated four “different people in your

life right now who you know. These must be people with whom you talk relatively regularly (at least once per year, depending on how long you've known the person). These people could be your family, friends, romantic partners, neighbors, colleagues, etc. Write the first name or initials of each person below. It may be hard to think of a person for each category, but please try your best.”

For the high receive/high provide condition, participants nominated someone who: “1) gives you consistent and high levels of emotional support AND 2) to whom you give consistent and high levels of emotional support” such as a “friend, romantic partner, colleague, and so on.” For the high receive/low provide condition, participants nominated someone who “1) gives you consistent and high levels of emotional support BUT 2) you do not give them as much emotional support” such as a “parent, mentor, assistant, and so on.” For the low receive/high provide conditions, participants nominated someone who “1) does not give you much emotional support BUT 2) you give them consistent and high levels of emotional support” such as “your child, mentee, employer, and so on.” Finally, for the low receive/low provide conditions, participants nominated someone who “1) does not give you much emotional support AND 2) you do not give much emotional support back” such as a “friend, romantic partner, colleague, and so on.” At the end of the survey, we asked participants to report whether they lied about any of their relationships (and assured them their pay would not be influenced); no participants reported lying.

In a randomized order, participants then answered a set of questions about each of the four relationships they had nominated. They reported “the most appropriate label” for the relationship (friend, romantic partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent, colleague, boss, subordinate, neighbor, acquaintance, or other). (The frequency of each type of relationship reported in each of the four experimental conditions can be found in Table S4.) Participants further described the relationship in detail using the same prompt from Study 1c (“How did you and [name] meet? How would you describe the nature of your relationship? You can talk about your relationship dynamics, how you feel about the relationship or anything else that might characterize your relationship that would be important for us to know.”)

For our primary measures, we used the same items described in Study 1a to measure how much participants felt like they knew their partner (*felt knowing*; $\alpha = .91$), felt that their partner knew them (*feeling known*; $\alpha = .91$), and felt satisfied in their relationship (*relationship satisfaction*; $\alpha = .77$), each measured on 7-point Likert scales. We further included several manipulation checks that we report in the Supplemental Materials; the checks confirmed that our manipulation worked as intended.

As potential control variables, participants rated: “How long have

you known [name]? Please enter the amount of time in years/months/weeks below.” and “How often do you have substantive conversations with [name]? Please try to note the time interval as precisely as possible.” (open-ended responses). Participants continued answering these questions for each relationship partner until they had responded about all four relationship partners.⁹ They last reported their own demographics (gender, age, and ethnicity).

6.2. Results

To test the hypothesized main effects, we conducted a linear regression model with relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, which included predictors of feeling known, felt knowing, the receive-support condition (dummy coded 1 = high receive, 0 = low receive), and the provide-support condition (dummy coded 1 = high provide, 0 = low provide¹⁰). As preregistered, we did not enter any interactions between the predictor variables into this initial model. We find the predicted effect of feeling known on satisfaction, $\beta = .43, p < .001$, and of receiving support on satisfaction, $\beta = .24, p < .001$. Significant effects on satisfaction also emerged for felt knowing, $\beta = .15, p < .001$, and for providing support, $\beta = .11, p < .001$, although these effects were relatively weaker (and we did not have *a priori* hypotheses about their existence). Comparisons of the beta coefficients in the model revealed that feeling known was a larger predictor of relationship satisfaction than felt knowing, $z = 3.97, p < .001$, and the receive support condition was a larger predictor of satisfaction than the provide support condition, $z = 3.36, p < .001$. None of these results meaningfully changed when including how long participants reported knowing their relationship partner, how frequently they interacted with their partner, or their demographics (age, gender) in the models.

Testing our moderation hypothesis, we conducted a preregistered linear regression model with relationship satisfaction as the dependent variable, and the following predictors: the difference score between feeling known and felt knowing, the receive-support condition, and the statistical interaction between the difference score and receive-support condition. We did not see the hypothesized interaction, $\beta = .05, p = .603$: a larger difference between feeling known and felt knowing predicted greater relationship satisfaction both when the relationship was characterized as high and low in received support. The correlations between each of the key variables, and all the regression output, can be found in the Supplemental Materials (Tables S5 and S6).

Given that these results did not support our hypotheses, we conducted an alternative analysis. Specifically, we tested whether, for relationships higher in received support, the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction was stronger than the correlation between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction. Indeed, for relationships higher in received support, the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction was stronger ($r = .70, p < .001$) than the correlation between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction ($r = .66, p < .001$), $z = 2.31, p = .021$. In contrast, for relationships lower in received support, the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction ($r = .53, p < .001$) was not significantly different from the relationship between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction ($r = .49, p < .001$), $z = 1.49, p = .136$. A direct comparison between these z-scores (2.31 and 1.49) suggests that the former is slightly stronger than the latter, $p = .058$.

We conducted the same correlational analysis for relationships

⁹ After reading participants' responses, we realized that 4 participants either reported lying about their relationship or reported a dubious relationship (e.g., with their cat). We report an analysis in the Supplemental Materials that removes these dubious cases and finds the same results.

¹⁰ In the preregistration, we mislabeled the coding and called this the “give” condition; it has been correctly labeled as the “provide” condition in the main text.

higher and lower in provided support. For relationships higher in provided support, the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction was stronger ($r = .60, p < .001$) than the correlation between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction ($r = .53, p < .001$), $z = 2.82, p = .005$. For relationships lower in provided support, the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction was also stronger ($r = .73, p < .001$) than the correlation between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction ($r = .64, p < .001$), $z = 4.36, p < .001$. Thus, it was only for relationships low in received support that feeling known was *not* more strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction than felt knowing.

Last, we note that there was evidence of the illusion of asymmetric insight in these data: participants believed they knew their relationship partners ($M = 4.68, SD = 1.60$) more than their partners knew them ($M = 4.37, SD = 1.71$), paired $t(799) = 9.09, p < .001, d = 0.19$.

6.3. Discussion

Why is feeling known a bigger predictor than felt knowing of relationship satisfaction in most relationships? We theorized that it is because feeling known is more important for feeling supported, which makes people typically feel satisfied in their relationships. Study 3 provides partial support for this theorizing; the extent to which participants expected that they would receive support in their relationship did not meaningfully moderate the effect of felt relationship knowledge type on satisfaction, but the correlation between feeling known and relationship satisfaction was stronger than between felt knowing and relationship satisfaction for relationships high in received support, high in provided support, and low in provided support – yet not for relationships low in received support. Indeed, only relationships low in received support showed no difference in the relative predictive power of feeling known and felt knowing, consistent with our theorizing. Study S3, reported in the Supplemental Materials, examines this idea further and finds that *desired* support in goal pursuit moderates the effect of felt relationship knowledge type on satisfaction (but does not distinguish between received and provided support).

7. Study 4: looking for love in all the wrong ways?

The results of Studies 1–3 suggest a potential issue that may emerge in relationship development: if people's relationship satisfaction depends primarily on how much they feel known, then when seeking a relationship partner people may tend to communicate wanting to be known more than wanting to know someone. Yet potential partners, who are driven by the same motivation, may prefer people who want to know them. Study 4 tests both of these potential implications: first, testing whether people writing dating profiles emphasize wanting to be known more than wanting to know a potential partner, and, second, testing whether evaluators perceive the writers who want to know them as more appealing than the writers who want to be known. Overall, Study 4 examines the intriguing possibility that the desire to be known makes people less adept at attracting a partner than they could be.

8. Pilot data: how much do online daters write about wanting to be known (vs to know)?

To first confirm that people prefer to be known by their potential partners more than know their partners, we reviewed several popular dating websites and selected two websites, Coffee Meets Bagel and Match.com, which met the following criteria: a) they allow users to access full individual profiles without requiring an account, b) they allow users to browse profiles without restrictions, and c) they contain user profiles with at least one long free response section that we could code. Three research assistants blind to hypotheses downloaded the first 100 profiles (50 male, 50 female) that they accessed on each website.

We provided the research assistants with a coding document that

described two categories of statements. *Wanting-to-be-known statements* were statements that indicate the focal person “wants a partner who wants to get to know the self (such as wanting a partner to know the self’s likes, preferences, goals, motivations, etc.)” (interrater reliability = 74% for Coffee Meets Bagel; 57% for Match.com). *Wanting-to-know statements* were statements that indicate the focal person “wants to get to know a partner (such as wanting to know the partner’s likes, preferences, goals, motivations, etc.)” (interrater reliability = 99% for Coffee Meets Bagel; 95% for Match.com). Each research assistant counted the number of statements that fit these criteria in each profile. In addition, the research assistants coded, “Overall, does this person seem to want to get to know their potential partners?” (0 = no, 1 = yes; interrater reliability = 83% for Coffee Meets Bagel; 57% for Match.com) and “Overall, does this person seem to want to be known by their potential partners?” (0 = no, 1 = yes; interrater reliability = 53% for Coffee Meets Bagel; 36% for Match.com). The research assistants practiced on five profiles to become aligned in their coding, with the primary experimenter resolving any discrepancies in the practice profile coding.

Across the 200 profiles, on average there were significantly more statements about wanting-to-be-known ($M = 0.80$, $SD = 0.29$) than about wanting-to-know ($M = 0.01$, $SD = 0.08$), $paired\ t(199) = 33.88$, $p < .001$, $d = 3.71$. Notably, almost no profiles contained wanting-to-know statements (about 1%: at least one coder identified such a statement in five profiles on Match.com and two coders identified such a statement in only one profile on Coffee Meets Bagel). Coders further rated about half of the profile-writers as wanting-to-be-known by a potential partner ($M = 0.52$, $SD = 0.36$), and significantly fewer as wanting-to-know a potential partner ($M = 0.21$, $SD = 0.31$), $paired\ t(199) = 11.30$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.92$. The same findings emerged in both the Coffee Meets Bagel and Match.com profiles separately. Overall, these data support our hypothesis that people trying to attract a partner express a desire to be known more than they express a desire to get to know a potential partner, at least in their online dating profiles.

8.1. Method

After collecting stimuli, we preregistered our hypotheses and analysis plan at <https://aspredicted.org/ik9ym.pdf>.¹¹

Stimuli (writers). We hoped to collect at least 25 profiles per condition to have adequate stimuli for the main study. As preregistered, we opened the survey to 90 participants on MTurk to write dating profiles in exchange for \$1.05. 69 followed the instructions and passed our preregistered criteria for being in the study¹² ($M_{age} = 28.97$ years, $SD = 11.07$; 31 male, 37 female, 1 non-binary; 53 White).

We randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions: uninstructed, want-to-know, or want-to-be-known. We first asked participants to “describe the plot of the most recent movie you watched in detail” so that participants who preferred not to write would leave the study at this point. Next, all participants received instructions to write a dating profile; we told participants to “make your Dating Profile as

¹¹ In the preregistration, we referred to wanting-to-be-known profiles as “know-self” and wanting-to-know profiles as “know-partner.”

¹² Participants completed a pre-survey for \$0.10 to determine whether they were eligible for the main study (additional \$0.90). They answered: “Are you currently in a romantic relationship?” (yes / no / other), “Are you currently looking for a romantic partner?” (yes / no / other). If they were looking for a partner, they answered: “What type of relationship are you looking for? Check all that apply” (hook-up only (i.e., a sexual relationship) / casual dating / serious but non-monogamous / serious and monogamous / other) and “How long have you been looking for a partner?” They also reported whether they were “currently on any dating websites” (yes / no) and, if so, listed the websites on which they were active and reported how long they have been on dating websites. Participants who reported being in a current romantic relationship and not looking for a partner were directed out of the survey; the rest of the participants remained for the main study.

appealing as possible to potential partners. You hope that potential partners will want to contact you after reading your Dating Profile.” In the uninstructed condition, we told participants to simply “write your profile”; in the want-to-know condition, we told participants to “write a profile to get to know your ideal partner”; and in the want-to-be-known condition, we told participants to “write a profile for your ideal partner to get to know you”.¹³

Selected Dating Profiles are shown in the Supplemental Materials (Table S7), and all are available on OSF. Before showing the profiles to evaluators, to ensure they were similarly readable across conditions, a research assistant blind to hypothesis and experimental condition reviewed each profile and corrected any major grammatical errors and made the formatting of each profile (e.g., capitalization) consistent. Evaluators also viewed the prompt instructions in the profiles to make them easier to read.

At the end of the survey, participants reported their age, gender, race, sexuality, and answered two free response questions, describing their “prior dating history” and “what they are looking for in a potential partner.”

Participants (evaluators). We planned to collect 250 evaluators. For attrition details, see Supplemental Materials. The final analysis contained 251 individuals ($M_{age} = 32.82$ years, $SD = 12.59$; 157 male, 94 female; 141 White) who participated on MTurk in exchange for \$0.75.

Procedure. We randomly assigned evaluators to view three profiles in the wanting-to-be-known, wanting-to-know, and uninstructed conditions (nine profiles in total) in randomized order. After reading each profile, evaluators completed two questions that asked them to “evaluate the dating profile you just saw from the point of view of a potential partner.” Specifically, we asked evaluators, “how much would a potential partner: (1) Find this person appealing; (2) Want to contact this person” (1 = *not at all*; 7 = *extremely*), which we preregistered combining into a single scale of how *appealing* the profile was ($r = 0.91$). At the end of the survey, evaluators answered the same questions about their own dating life as the writers had completed.

8.2. Results

Using mixed linear regression models with experimental condition as the fixed effect and participant number and Dating Profile number as random effects, there was an effect of the instruction condition on evaluations, $F(2, 2006) = 10.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$. Supporting our hypothesis, evaluators believed that potential partners would find the want-to-know Dating Profiles to be more appealing ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.63$) than the want-to-be-known Dating Profiles ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.63$), $t(1,252.53) = 3.57$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.17$, and the uninstructed Dating Profiles ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 1.65$), $t(1,251.47) = 4.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.20$. In contrast, they believed that partners would perceive the want-to-be-known and uninstructed Dating Profiles no differently from each other, $t(1,262.39) = 0.61$, $p = .545$, $d = 0.02$.

¹³ To aid participants in this task, we provided them with specific prompts that they would complete. All participants started by “sharing some simple information about yourself, like your gender and where you live in the world.” In the uninstructed condition, we next told participants to “write at least two sentences to finish the rest of your Dating Profile.” In the want-to-know condition, we instead told participants to “explain why you are excited to get to know your future partner” and “describe what you will do to get to know your partner.” In contrast, in the want-to-be-known condition, we told participants to “explain why you are excited for your future partner to get to know you” and “describe what you will do for your partner to get to know you.” To keep the length relatively similar, we asked participants to write at least one sentence for each prompt; thus, participants tended to write three sentences on average for each Dating Profile.

8.3. Discussion

Study 4 suggests that writers of dating profiles under-communicate their desire to know their partners to their own detriment. Whereas online daters from two popular dating websites (*Match.com* and *Coffee Meets Bagel*) overwhelmingly expressed their desire to be known more than their desire to know a potential partner, separate evaluators in a controlled experiment instead perceived that partners would prefer someone who desires to know them more than someone who desires to be known. Finding a relationship partner requires signaling an interest in knowing the partner, not just being known by the partner.

Because it is possible that the wanting-to-be-known dating profiles might have varied from the wanting-to-know profiles in more than one way in this study, we conducted a follow-up test of the hypothesis using nearly identical profiles (see Supplemental Study S4). The profiles contained the same content but either expressed wanting to be known by a partner (e.g., “I want someone who will understand me and always stand by my side”) or wanting to know a partner (e.g., “I want to understand you and always stand by your side”). Even using these nearly identical profiles, evaluators reported that the wanting-to-know profiles were seen as more appealing than the wanting-to-be-known profiles (see Supplemental Materials for details). Overall, these data suggest that people communicate their desire to be known too strongly—and their desire to know a future partner too weakly—to the potential detriment of attracting partners.

9. General discussion

Relationships are built on a foundation of mutual knowledge, but this research shows that the belief that one *is known* matters more for relationship satisfaction than the belief that one *knows* their partner. From relationships with romantic partners, to siblings, to friends, and to neighbors, the studies consistently found that the belief that one is known (i.e., “feeling known”) was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than the belief that one knows their partner (i.e., “felt knowing”). Feeling known was not only more strongly associated with increased satisfaction but also causally enhanced expected satisfaction more than feeling knowing. We further identify an implication for how people seek and maintain relationships with others, finding that people trying to attract a romantic partner via an online dating profile were more focused on signaling their desire to be known than their desire to know a future partner. But observers recognized that potential partners would be less interested in the dating-profile-writers who wanted to be known than in the writers who wanted to know a future partner. To connect with a relationship partner, it may be important to signal that you want to get to know them rather than only asking them to get to know you.

10. Theoretical contributions

The current findings make several theoretical contributions. First, prior research on the illusion of asymmetric knowledge, an illusion which we found in almost every dataset we collected,¹⁴ identifies a pervasive tendency for people to believe that they know their relationship partners better than their partners know them (Pronin et al., 2001). However, the implications of this illusion for relationship satisfaction are not known. Our research provides a potential answer, indicating that the little people believe they are known may matter more for their relationship satisfaction. A potential implication of this is that people’s perception that others do not know them can lead them to feel less satisfied in their relationships. If people realized that others know them as much as they know others, they might feel happier in their daily

relationships.

Second, while knowledge is key to a satisfying relationship (Swan, 1990), there have been only limited attempts to compare between different types of knowledge, as well as related constructs like understanding, responsiveness, and self-disclosure (e.g., Murray et al., 2002; Murray et al., 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Sprecher et al., 2013) in predicting relationship satisfaction.

For one, Pollmann and Finkenauer (2009) found that subjective understanding was more important for relationship satisfaction than objective understanding, and that the perception of being understood by a partner was more closely associated with relationship intimacy and trust than the perception of understanding a partner. For another, Lemay et al. (2007) found that the perception that one’s romantic partner was responsive predicted relationship satisfaction more than being responsive toward one’s partner. While these findings are consistent with the effect we observe in the current paper, Lemay et al. neither directly compared the two types of subjective knowledge (being known, knowing) nor did they examine relationships beyond marriages. Our research is the first to try to disentangle the relative power of believing one is known and believing one knows a partner on relationship satisfaction across a broader array of relationships over the lifespan (e.g., with parents, friends, neighbors, and so on). In so doing, our research indicates that it is possible, both theoretically and empirically, to separate between the two types of subjective relationship knowledge, even though they tend to correlate positively in most relationships. Furthermore, our research provides a counterpoint to evolutionary models of mating that imply that knowing the “quality” of a mate (or another relationship partner) may be more important for relationship success than being known (e.g., Miller & Todd, 1998). Instead, our research suggests that the perception of being known matters more for experienced relationship satisfaction.

Third, our findings help unite research on relationship success with research on goal pursuit. Scholars have sought to disentangle how relationship partners’ different or similar goals influence their relationship satisfaction (Chandler et al., 2023; Fitzsimons et al., 2015) and, conversely, how relationship satisfaction can influence goal pursuit (Huang et al., 2015). Joining this growing literature, our work suggests that one potential reason why feeling known is a bigger predictor of relationship satisfaction than felt knowing is because individuals seek support – both emotional support (Study 3) and instrumental support (in goal pursuit; Study S3).

Our research also speaks to the difficult balance in all relationships of thinking about oneself versus thinking about the other person. The natural human tendency is to focus first on oneself, given that one’s own perspective is the default lens through which people experience their worlds (e.g., naïve realism; Pronin et al., 2004). One empirical example of people’s tendency to think about themselves before others comes from how pervasively people overclaim credit for group or dyad tasks (Brawley, 1984; Kruger & Gilovich, 1999; Kruger & Savitsky, 2009; Ross & Sicoly, 1979; Thompson & Kelley, 1981; for a review, see Leary & Forsyth, 1987). Only when forced to explicitly consider what others contributed do people make more accurate contribution claims (Caruso et al., 2006; Schroeder et al., 2016). Another example comes from research in instrumental relationships (e.g., with work colleagues and service providers) whereby people tend to put their own needs before that of their co-workers or service providers (e.g., Belmi & Schroeder, 2021; Schroeder & Fishbach, 2015; Schroeder et al., 2017). The current paper demonstrates a novel way in which people are inadvertently self-focused beyond work and instrumental relationships: their relationship satisfaction derives from feeling known, which involves focusing more on oneself, more than felt knowing, which involves focusing more on one’s partner.

Finally, this research has implications for what people look for in their relationship partners. Much prior work focuses on which attributes people prefer in their romantic partners, such as men preferring attractive female mates and females preferring wealthy male mates (e.g.,

¹⁴ Evidence for the illusion emerged in Studies 1a, 1c, and 3 as well as in Studies S1, S2, and S3 – but not in Study 1b.

Buss & Schmitt, 2019); other research has focused on globally appealing traits such as humor and compassion (Joel et al., 2017) or the perception that a partner is invested in you (Joel et al., 2013). Our results suggest that online daters may seek partners who will want to know them more than partners who want to be known. Hence, rather than focusing on a particular appealing trait or set of traits, we identify a particular motivational mindset (the interest in being known) that people possess when searching for partners. In such a way, our findings are more aligned with prior work that has considered other motivational factors that influence people's decisions to start relationships, such as people's fear of being single (Spielmann et al., 2013).

10.1. Future directions and limitations

Our studies are not without limitations, which identify directions for future research. First, more could be done to understand people's awareness about what makes them feel satisfied in their relationships. Do people think that being more known enhances their satisfaction, compared to knowing their partner more? We find in Study 4 that people actively seek partners who want to know them – but it does not imply that they recognize that feeling known is more important for their satisfaction than felt knowing. People may assume that knowing their partners is necessary to appreciate these people's company. Indeed, participants in Study 1b (and Supplemental Study S2) believed that knowing their partner was a better predictor of their satisfaction than feeling known. The data we have collected thus far suggest that people's desire to start a relationship reflects some recognition that feeling known matters more for satisfaction, but when asked explicitly about what satisfies them in an existing relationship, people do not admit that feeling known is more important. Future research could seek to better understand people's beliefs about what will make them happy compared to what actually makes them happy in their relationship, as people may be mistakenly pursuing relationship happiness ineffectively without knowing it.

Second, the extent to which our findings go beyond subjective knowledge is unclear. Because we examined the *belief* that one is known or knows one's partner, and not actual knowledge, we cannot be sure whether people's own self-knowledge was accurate or how much their partners' knowledge corresponded with people's belief they are known. Indeed, objective knowledge is not the same as subjective knowledge (and not even correlated in Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009, Table 2). For example, our participants may have had positive illusions about themselves, exaggerating their beliefs that they knew or were known.

In examining objective knowledge, Sprecher et al. (2013) found that people like a new relationship partner more when the partner self-discloses to them (thus increasing their knowledge of the partner) than when they self-disclose to the partner (thus increasing the partner's knowledge of them), suggesting that knowing might actually increase liking more than being known. This result could suggest a boundary condition for our effect. While a stranger's self-disclosures signal vulnerability (and self-disclosing to a stranger might feel threatening), in the context of ongoing or imaginary-desired relationships, people seek to feel known, such that the relationships are more centered around them.

Third, the domain of knowledge could moderate our effect. In our studies, individuals reported whether their partner knew aspects of their mind (e.g., their opinions, thoughts, and feelings). If we instead asked individuals whether their partner knew a physical fact about them (e.g., whether they have a freckle on their back), would the results generalize? We suspect that greater intimacy is related to knowing a person's mind more than their body (as focusing on a body can be objectifying; Cikara et al., 2011; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Gervais et al., 2012; Gray et al., 2011), but future research could examine this. It could also depend on the nature of the relationship; in some relationships (e.g., with one's parents or spouses), body knowledge may seem appropriate but less so in other relationships (e.g., with new friends). And in some

relationships, too much knowledge could feel overly intimate and even be undesirable (Schroeder et al., 2017). The fact that people do not always prefer to know more about their partner—or be known by their partner—suggests that knowledge may not have a linear association with relationship satisfaction, or may only be good up to a point.

11. Conclusion

The belief that one is *known* in a relationship is more closely associated with relationship satisfaction than the belief that one *knows* their partner. A possible reason for this result is that feeling known is a precursor to feeling supported in a relationship. So long as a person's relationship enjoyment depends more on the perception of receiving good support than providing it, their belief that they are known will be more associated with their relationship satisfaction than their belief that they know their partner. Overall, feeling known is critical for feeling satisfied in a relationship.

Author note

We thank the Booth School of Business and Haas School of Business for financial support. We thank the research assistants who helped with this research: Aida Baron, Tory Benson, Madison Butolph, Yajun Cao, Andrew Chen, Danqiao (Gloria) Cheng, Danae MacLeod, Naz Dunar, Zoe Ferguson, Myer Galis, Grace (Minji) Kim, Lorene Li, Yin Li, Stephanie Millot, Gabby Nguyen, Kirthana Nore, Parth Patel, Anoushka Sharma, Mel Stevens, Lila Stoddard, Nova Tseng, Preston Tso, Elena Wong, and Weishan Zhang, and with particular thanks to lab managers Jennifer Abel, Aastha Mittal, Kwan Limbhasut, and Sydney Tran. Data, analysis code, study materials, and supplemental studies are available at: <https://osf.io/zq4r5/>. Links to preregistrations (on AsPredicted.com) can be found in the Method sections of Studies 1a, 1c, 3, 4, S3, and S4.

Declaration of Competing Interest

During the preparation of this work the authors did not use any AI services (like ChatGPT). The authors have reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Data availability

Data, study materials, analysis code, and supplemental studies are available at: <https://osf.io/zq4r5/>.

Appendix A. Supplemental materials

Supplemental materials to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104559>.

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