

Abstract

In three studies, we examined the association between perceived flexibility to initiate or cease interpersonal relationships (relational mobility) and well-being. We found that people who perceive greater relational mobility in their environment reported feeling greater well-being, which was mediated by the increased quality of their relationships with close others (Studies 1 and 2). Moreover, differences in national level of relational mobility explained differences in national well-being, again accounted for by the quality of relationships. Specifically, how much people perceive that they can rely on close others mediated the effect of relational mobility on well-being (Study 3). These findings persisted after controlling for factors that may contribute to well-being including extraversion, self-construal, and financial circumstances. These findings demonstrate the importance of perception of one's surrounding environment on well-being, indicating potential interventions to increase well-being of individuals and societies.

Keywords: Relational mobility, Well-being, Interpersonal relationships, Culture

The role of relational mobility in individual and national well-being:

Assessing relationships among relational mobility, relationship quality, and personal well-being

The impact of interpersonal relationships on well-being has been well-demonstrated in prior work. The feeling of being related to others is a key influence on happiness (Argyle 1987; Demir 2008; Myers 1999). Having stable and supportive relationships even contributes to resilience across the lifespan (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). These effects are not merely about having a greater number of relationships; previous research has found that, above and beyond the number of relationships, relationship *quality* better predicts well-being (Nezlek, 2000) (see Ryan & Deci, 2001 for a review).

Recent research has shown that a key factor for the quality of relationships is how easy people think it is for those in their local social environment to initiate and end interpersonal relationships. Specifically, while entering into and exiting relationships is relatively easy in some societies, in other societies, relationships with friends, romantic partners, and family members are largely fixed, and opportunities to change these relationships are limited. This flexibility in the case of interpersonal relationships and networks is known as “relational mobility” (Kito et al., 2017; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Importantly, in a recent study examining the relational mobility of 39 different nations (Thomson et al., 2018), people in societies with higher relational mobility reported a higher quality of interpersonal relationships with their friends and partners. Indices of relationship quality included reporting disclosing secrets more often to social partners, providing greater social support to social partners, experiencing greater levels of intimacy with social partners, and even being more likely to trust strangers. This research suggests that, because one’s social partners may have (or may be perceived as having) more opportunities to look for alternatives in societies characterized by high relational mobility, people engage in more proactive behaviors to prevent their social partners from leaving them, ultimately enhancing the quality of the relationships.

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3 To our knowledge, however, the direct associations among relational mobility, quality of
4 relationships, *and* well-being have been understudied. One exception is a study that found
5 greater self-esteem contributes to happiness more for people from a society with greater
6 relational mobility (i.e., Americans) compared to people from a society with lower relational
7 mobility (i.e., Japanese) (Yuki et al., 2013). Nevertheless, a direct investigation of the effect of
8 relational mobility on well-being is needed, in part to provide insights into potential interventions
9 for improving well-being and understanding the mechanisms that drive national differences in
10 well-being around the world.
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20 In the present research, we hypothesized that people who perceive greater relational
21 mobility around them would report having greater well-being, an effect that would be accounted
22 for by an increase in quality of interpersonal relationships with their friends, family members,
23 and partners. In Study 1, we explored the associations among individuals' levels of relational
24 mobility, quality of relationships, and their well-being. In Study 2, we examined the influence of
25 relational mobility on two specific aspects of well-being: eudaimonic (meaning of life; Ryff, 1989)
26 and hedonic (pleasant feeling; Diener et al., 2002) well-being. Finally, in Study 3, we expanded
27 the scope of research and examined whether relational mobility could account for any national
28 differences in well-being, again mediated by differences in quality of relationships.
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41 Study 1

42 Method

43 *Participants*

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45 One hundred and ten Mturkers who passed the attention check questions, out of total
46 160, were included in the analyses (44.5% female; age $M = 34.67$, $S.D. = 9.77$). The post-hoc
47 power analysis for the indirect effect model (Schoemann et al., 2017;
48 https://schoemanna.shinyapps.io/mc_power_med/) revealed that we acquired strong power
49 (power = .89) with this sample size.
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Materials

As part of a large battery survey, participants completed the relational mobility scale (Thomson et al., 2018) (see Supplementary Section 1A for the attention check questions and the measures not analyzed for the current study). Participants' well-being was measured with the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; e.g., *"I am satisfied with life"*; Diener et al., 1985) and the Positive Relations with Others (PRO) subscale of the Psychological Well-being scale (e.g., *"I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others (R)"*; Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2010). Participants' quality of relationships was assessed with questions probing how likely participants would be to share their secrets and worries with their best friend and closest family member (self-disclosure; Thomson et al., 2018; Yuki & Schug, 2012) and their subjective closeness to their best friend and closest family member (Thomson et al., 2018; Yuki & Schug, 2012). Additionally, a Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling et al., 2003) was administered; familial socio-economic status (SES; *"What is your family's socioeconomic level?"* lower income, lower middle income, middle income, upper middle income, upper income) was also measured. Personality and SES factors have been shown to be relevant to both well-being (Pavot et al., 1990) and the freedom to choose relationships (Carey & Markus, 2017; Carey & Zhang-Bencharit, 2018; Palisi & Ransford, 1987) so were controlled for in further analyses (see Supplementary Section 2 for Cronbach's alpha values). For this study and Study 2, all procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at [Blinded for peer review].

Results

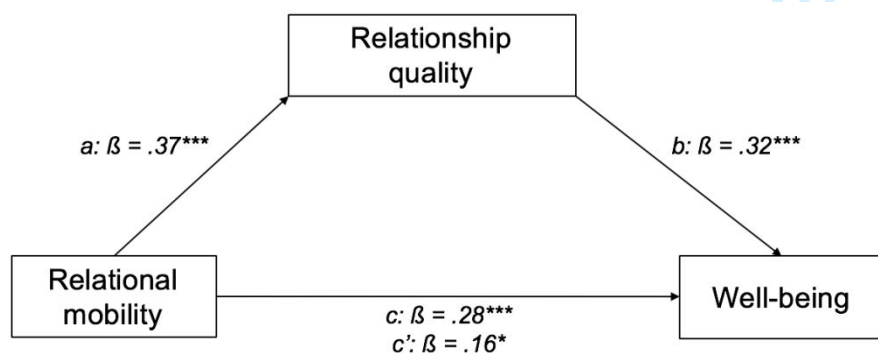
First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis using a principal component extraction method on self-disclosure to best friend, self-disclosure to closest family member, subjective closeness to best friend and subjective closeness to closest family member, applying varimax rotation and looking for factors with eigenvalue greater than 1. This factor analysis revealed only one factor, eigen value = 2.29, explaining 57.23% of the variance. We labeled this factor "relationship quality" (Table S1). The same factor analysis on SWLS and PRO also

revealed a single factor, eigen value = 1.46, explaining 73.01% of the variance. We labeled this factor “well-being” (Table S2) (see Supplementary Section 3A for findings without the use of factor analyses).

We then examined the indirect effect of relational mobility on the well-being factor, entering the relationship quality factor as the mediator, controlling for extraversion and SES, using the “INDIRECT” macro (bootstrapped $n = 1,000$) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). As predicted, relational mobility was significantly associated with relationship quality ($B = .47$, $S.E. = .11$, $\beta = .37$, $t = 4.28$, $p < .001$), which was in turn associated with well-being ($B = .32$, $S.E. = .08$, $\beta = .32$, $t = 4.11$, $p < .001$). The significant total effect of relational mobility on well-being ($B = .36$, $S.E. = .09$, $\beta = .28$, $t = 3.80$, $p < .001$) was reduced after entering relational quality in the model ($B = .21$, $S.E. = .10$, $\beta = .16$, $t = 2.18$, $p = .032$), Standardized indirect effect = .12, $S.E. = .04$, 95% CI = [.05, .23] (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Increased perception of relational mobility was associated with enhanced relationship quality, which was in turn associated with enhanced well-being. Trait extraversion and socio-economic status were controlled for.



Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$.

Study 1 Discussion

We found evidence for an association between relational mobility and well-being, mediated by relationship quality. These initial findings suggest that an environment that

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3 facilitates relationship choice may also support enhanced relationships, which may in turn lead
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5 to enhanced well-being.
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7 We note, however, that the well-being measures used in Study 1 were limited and did
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9 not cover diverse aspects of well-being. Furthermore, differences in relational mobility often co-
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11 occur with differences in cultural concepts such as a culturally shaped view of self (Yuki et al.,
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13 2013). Study 2 addresses these limitations.
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16 17 18 **Study 2**

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20 Previous research has found that the antecedents of relational mobility often overlap
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22 with antecedents of other cultural concepts such as a culturally influenced view of self. For
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24 instance, relational mobility is higher in North America, where an independent view of self is
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26 more predominant, and lower in East Asia, where an interdependent view of self dominates
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28 (Thomson et al., 2018; Yuki et al., 2013). Other studies have also suggested that herding
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30 societies are more individualistic than farming societies (Uskul et al., 2008), similarly giving rise
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32 to high versus low relational mobility, respectively (Thomson et al., 2018).
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35 Cultural characteristics can also covary with individuals' well-being. For example,
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37 previous research has revealed an association between an independent, individualistic view of
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39 self and greater well-being (Elliott & Coker, 2008). Even the meaning of happiness itself can be
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41 shaped by cultural context (Uchida et al., 2004). To account for potential overlaps between
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43 individualism and relational mobility, and the concurrent effect of these variables on well-being,
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45 we measured the degree to which participants endorsed an independent, individualistic view of
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47 self versus an interdependent, collectivistic view of self in Study 2 and controlled for these views
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49 in the model.
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51 Finally, past literature has suggested diverse aspects of well-being. For example, while
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53 feeling pleasure and feeling satisfied are thought to comprise well-being (Hedonic well-being),
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55 living the "good life" (being moral, virtuous, achieving growth) is also critical to well-being
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(Eudaimonic well-being; Linley et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2011; Phillips et al., 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Tiberius, 2013; Tiberius & Hall, 2010). In Study 2, we examined the effect of relational mobility on these different aspects of well-being, controlling for individuals' view of self, and replicating the Study 1 findings. The hypotheses and research methods are preregistered at [<https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=5yt9m4>].

Methods

Participants

Three hundred and fifty-four Mturkers who passed the attention check questions, out of total 392, were included in the analyses (44.9% female; age $M = 37.12$, $S.D. = 10.99$). Sample size was determined based on the effect size of a separate task included in the battery. The post-hoc power analysis for the indirect effect model (Schoemann et al., 2017; https://schoemanna.shinyapps.io/mc_power_med/) revealed that we acquired very strong power (power > .99) with this sample size.

Materials

As in Study 1, participants completed the relational mobility scale (Thomson et al., 2018) and measurements of relationship quality. To capture various aspects of participants' well-being, we administered the SWLS (Diener et al., 1985), Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; e.g., *"In general, I consider myself: Not a very happy person --- A very happy person"*, Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999), Affect Valuation Index (AVI; e.g., *"Over the course of a typical week, I actually feel..."*, Tsai et al., 2006; actual high-arousal positive states [*enthusiastic, excited, elated, euphoric*], actual low-arousal positive states [*calm, relaxed, peaceful, serene*]), Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; e.g., *"Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week"*, Watson et al., 1988; positive experiences [*interested, excited, strong, enthusiastic, proud, alert, inspired, determined, attentive, active*], negative experiences [*distressed, upset, guilty, scared, hostile, irritable, ashamed, nervous, jittery, afraid*]), and all Psychological Well-being subscales in addition to PRO (e.g., Autonomy [*"I am not afraid to voice my opinions"*],

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3 Environmental Mastery [*“I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live”*], Personal Growth
4 [*“I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons (R)”*], Purpose in Life [*“I have a*
5 *sense of direction and purpose in life”*], Self-Acceptance [*“When I look at the story of my life, I*
6 *am pleased with how things have turned out”*], PRO; Ryff, 1989; Ryff et al., 2010).

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11 As a control, the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) was administered to measure the
12 extent to which participants endorse independent (e.g., *“I enjoy being unique and different from*
13 *others in many respects”*) versus interdependent (e.g., *“I have respect for the authority figures*
14 *with whom I interact”*) self-construal. We subtracted participants' interdependent self-construal
15 scores from their independent self-construal scores, generating “independent minus
16 interdependent self-construal” scores and included them in the further analyses to control for
17 overlap between self-construal and relational mobility. Additionally, participants' extraversion
18 and SES were measured, as in Study 1 (see Supplementary Section 1B for measures not
19 analyzed for the current study; see Supplementary Section 2 for Cronbach's alpha values).

30 Results

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32 First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the measures of relationship
33 quality, applying varimax rotation and looking for factors with eigenvalue greater than 1. As in
34 Study 1, this analysis revealed a single “relationship quality” factor (Table S3), eigen value =
35 2.09, explaining 52.33% of the variance. Second, factor analysis on SWLS, SHS, actual high-
36 arousal and low-arousal positive states from AVI, positive and negative emotional experiences
37 from PANAS, and all subscales of PWB revealed two factors: “Eudaimonic well-being” and
38 “Hedonic well-being” (Table 1) (see Supplementary Section 3B for findings without the use of
39 factor analyses).

49 Table 1

50 *Study 2 well-being factors: Rotated component matrix*

54 Factor

Items	Eudaimonic well-being	Hedonic well-being	Communi- nalities
PWB: Personal growth	.84		.72
PWB: Purpose in life	.81	.32	.75
PWB: Environmental mastery	.78	.46	.83
PWB: Positive social relationships	.73	.37	.67
PWB: Autonomy	.63		.41
PANAS: Negative emotional experience	-.77		.60
PANAS: Positive emotional experience		.83	.75
AVI: Actual high-arousal positive states		.90	.81
AVI: Actual low-arousal positive states	.31	.75	.65
SWLS		.77	.67
SHS	.49	.72	.75
Eigenvalues	5.78	1.83	
Percentage of Total variance	52.53%	16.63%	
Total variance	69.16%		

Note. Rotated component values smaller than .3 not displayed; biggest rotated component values marked in grey; PWB = Psychological Well-Being; PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; AVI = Affect Valuation Index; SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; SHS = Subjective Happiness Scale

We used the “INDIRECT” macro (bootstrapped $n = 1,000$) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to examine whether relational mobility could impact participants’ eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, respectively, through enhanced relationship quality, controlling for participants’ independent minus interdependent self-construal, extraversion, and SES. We further controlled

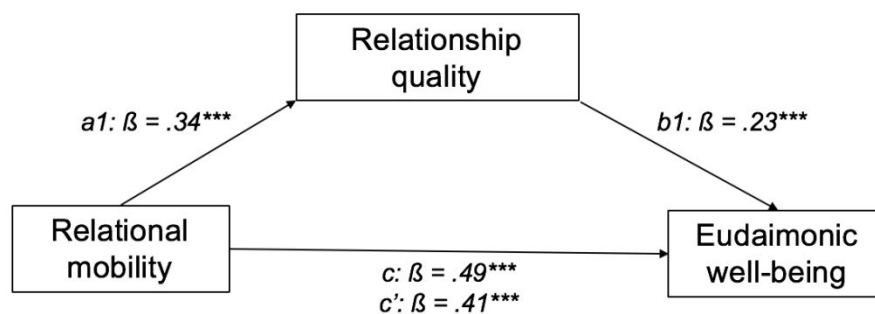
for the other component of well-being (i.e., controlling hedonic well-being when examining the effect of relational mobility on eudaimonic well-being and vice versa).

First, with eudaimonic well-being as the dependent variable, relational mobility was significantly associated with relationship quality scores ($B = .47$, $S.E. = .06$, $\beta = .34$, $t = 7.23$, $p < .001$). The relationship quality factor was in turn associated with eudaimonic well-being ($B = .23$, $S.E. = .05$, $\beta = .23$, $t = 5.06$, $p < .001$). The significant total effect of relational mobility on eudaimonic well-being ($B = .66$, $S.E. = .06$, $\beta = .49$, $t = 11.52$, $p < .001$) was reduced after entering relational quality scores in the model ($B = .56$, $S.E. = .06$, $\beta = .41$, $t = 9.29$, $p < .001$), Standardized indirect effect = $.08$, $S.E. = .02$, $95\% \text{ CI} = [.05, .12]$ (Figure 2A).

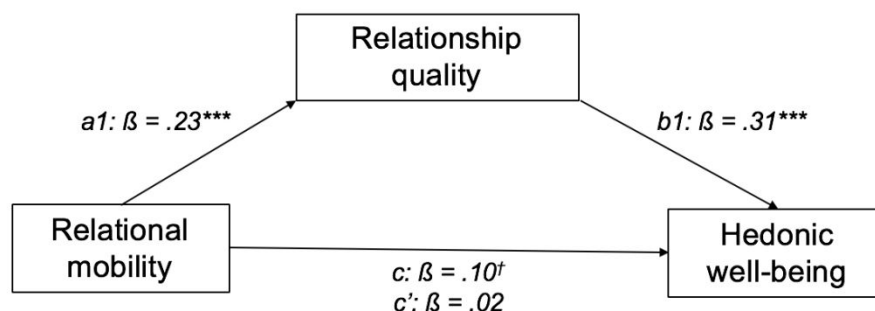
Figure 2

Greater relational mobility was associated with enhanced quality of relationships, which in turn was associated with enhanced (A) eudaimonic well-being and (B) hedonic well-being. Trait extraversion, self-construal scores (independent minus interdependent), socio-economic status, and hedonic well-being (A) or eudaimonic well-being (B) were controlled for.

A



B



Note. $^{\dagger}p < .10$, $^*p < .05$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Second, with hedonic well-being as the dependent variable, relational mobility was again significantly associated with relationship quality scores ($B = .31$, $S.E. = .08$, $\beta = .23$, $t = 4.09$, $p < .001$), which were in turn associated with hedonic well-being ($B = .31$, $S.E. = .05$, $\beta = .31$, $t = 6.31$, $p < .001$). The total marginal effect of relational mobility on hedonic well-being ($B = .13$, $S.E. = .07$, $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.75$, $p = .081$) became non-significant after entering relational quality scores in the model ($B = .03$, $S.E. = .07$, $\beta = .02$, $t = .45$, $p = .651$), Standardized indirect effect = $.07$, $S.E. = .02$, 95% CI = $[.03, .13]$ (Figure 2B).

Study 2 Discussion

In Study 2, we explored different aspects of well-being, i.e., eudaimonic and hedonic, and we found that the effects of relational mobility on relationship quality were consistent across both kinds of well-being.

We note, however, that these findings are restricted to participants who use the American online labor platform. To test the generalizability of these effects for a different sample, and to explore whether relational mobility can explain differences in well-being across nations, we analyzed the associations among relational mobility, relationship quality, and well-being on the national level in Study 3.

Study 3

In Study 3, we examined whether the associations among relational mobility, relationship quality, and well-being can be replicated using national level data retrieved from the world relationships survey (relationalmobility.org; Thomson et al., 2018) and Gallup world poll survey (2019).

Methods

Nations

We focused on nations with available relational mobility data (Thomson et al., 2018), a complete set of relationship quality indices and well-being measures from the Gallup poll survey data (2019). As a result, we were able to include a total of 30 nations¹ in our final dataset.

Materials

We extracted the national relational mobility data and measures of relationship quality data from the world relationships survey (relationalmobility.org; Thomson et al., 2018). To assess national levels of relationship quality, we used indices including: intimacy with romantic partner, intimacy with closest friend, social support for romantic partner, social support for closest friend, perceived similarity with romantic partner, perceived similarity with closest friend, self-disclosure toward romantic partner, self-disclosure toward closest friend, trust in strangers, and seeing oneself as a trusting person. From the Gallup poll, we extracted two additional measures: Having relatives or friends that people can count on to help when needed (% of people who answered “Yes”) and feeling that their friends and family give them positive energy (1: Strongly disagree – 5: Strongly agree, aggregated score per nation)².

To assess national levels of well-being, we extracted the following indices from the Gallup poll: Community well-being (respondents like where they live, feel safe, and have pride in their community), physical well-being (respondents have good health and enough energy to get things done daily), purpose well-being (respondents like what they do each day and be motivated to achieve their goals), and life evaluation in general (respondents’ perception of where they stand now and in the future). For these measures, Gallup categorized respondents into “thriving”, “struggling” or “suffering” based on their answers. We subtracted % of respondents who were categorized into “suffering” from % of respondents who were categorized

¹ Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, Estonia, Hong Kong, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Taiwan

² For these and additional indices from Gallup poll, we looked for data collected in 2018. However, when a nation did not have a data point in 2018, we used a data point from the most recent year (the oldest year was 2014) to maximize the sample size.

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3 into “thriving” for each nation, generating a “% thriving minus suffering” index per measure³.
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5 Additionally, we included an index of experienced well-being on the day before the survey
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7 (index generated from Gallup by compiling % of respondents who answered “yes” to questions
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9 including whether respondents felt well-rested, felt enjoyment, smiled or laughed a lot, were
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11 treated with respect, and learned or did something interesting the day before the survey)⁴.
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14 Finally, we controlled for each nation’s GDP per capita (International Monetary Fund,
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16 2019) in the model. A separate analysis in which we additionally controlled for the individualism
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18 scores of each nation (Supplementary Section 5) revealed the same findings.
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20 Results

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22 An exploratory factor analysis⁵ on the measures of relationship quality, applying varimax
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24 rotation and looking for factors with eigenvalue greater than 1, revealed three different factors
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26 that we labeled Closeness, Reliance, and Trusting (Table 2) (see Supplementary Section 3C for
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28 findings without the use of factor analyses).
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31 **Table 2**

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33 *Study 3 relationship quality factors: Rotated component matrix⁶*

Items	Factor			
	Closeness	Reliance	Trusting	Communalities

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44 ³ We found the same patterns of results using % of respondents who were categorized into “thriving” (Supplementary
45 Section 4).

46 ⁴ Although we included experienced negative emotion on the day before the survey (index generated from Gallup by
47 compiling % of respondents who answered “yes” to questions asking whether they felt sadness, worry, physical pain,
48 anger, and stress) in the initial factor analysis, experienced negative emotion itself formed its own factor. Thus, we
49 dropped this variable from the final factor analysis. Experienced negative emotion was not correlated with relational
50 mobility, Pearson’s $r = -.14$, $p = .451$.

51 ⁵ Although factor analysis on a small size of sample could lead to limited findings and should be treated with care,
52 because of the nature of the data in Study 3, we used the greatest size of sample we could obtain. We explored the
53 indirect effect of each relationship quality measure on each well-being measure, and found similar results.

54 Specifically, receiving positive energy from friends and family (one of the Reliance components) accounted for the
55 associations between relational mobility and well-being (Supplementary Section 3C).

56 ⁶ Dropping cross-loading factors (Intimacy with romantic partner, Perceived similarity with romantic partner, and
57 Having relatives or friends to count on; having loading values $>.50$ on more than one factor [Costello & Osborne,
58 2005]) revealed the same three factors.
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Social support for romantic partner	.83			.70
Social support for closest friend	.79			.70
Intimacy with romantic partner	.54	.52	.45	.76
Intimacy with close friend	.78			.70
Perceived similarity with romantic partner	.63	.39	.51	.81
Perceived similarity with close friend	.80			.80
Receiving positive energy from friends and family		.91		.90
Having relatives or friends to count on		.69	.52	.74
Self-disclosure toward romantic partner		.80	.47	.91
Self-disclosure toward closest friend	.41	.72	.34	.80
Trust in strangers			.80	.74
Seeing oneself as a trusting person			.89	.84
Eigenvalues	5.86	2.28	1.25	
Percentage of Total variance	48.84%	18.98%	10.43%	
Total variance	78.25%			

Note. Rotated component values smaller than .3 not displayed; biggest rotated component values marked in grey

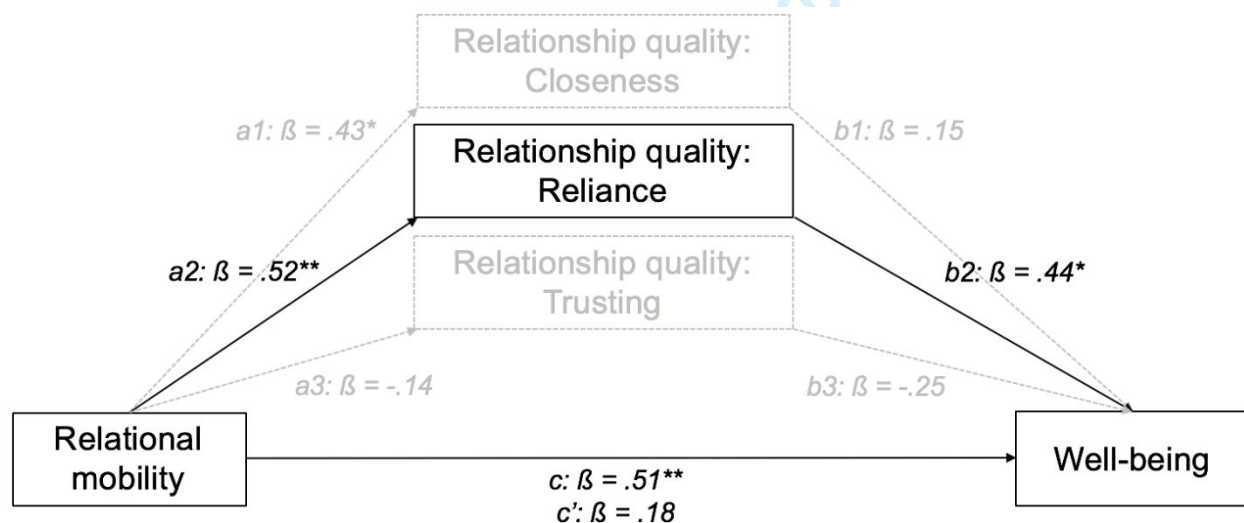
Second, we conducted a factor analysis on the measurements of well-being. This factor analysis revealed only one factor ("Well-being"), eigen value = 3.71, explaining 74.15 % of variance (Table S4).

We used the "INDIRECT" macro (bootstrapped $n = 1,000$) (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to examine the associations among the national level of relational mobility, different components of quality of relationships, and well-being, controlling for the log-transformed GDP per nation. First, national relational mobility was positively associated with greater closeness to friend and partner

($B = 2.12$, $S.E. = .91$, $\beta = .43$, $t = 2.34$, $p = .027$) and greater reliance on friend and partner ($B = 2.57$, $S.E. = .79$, $\beta = .52$, $t = 3.28$, $p = .003$), but not with trusting others ($B = -.71$, $S.E. = .70$, $\beta = -.14$, $t = -1.01$, $p = .321$). Among the three components of relationship quality, only reliance on close others was significantly associated with well-being ($B = .44$, $S.E. = .16$, $\beta = .44$, $t = 2.72$, $p = .012$), while closeness ($B = .15$, $S.E. = .13$, $\beta = .15$, $t = 1.11$, $p = .278$) and trusting others ($B = -.25$, $S.E. = .19$, $\beta = -.25$, $t = -1.33$, $p = .197$) were not. The direct effect of national relational mobility on well-being ($B = 2.51$, $S.E. = .72$, $\beta = .51$, $t = 3.51$, $p = .002$) became non-significant after entering relationship quality factors in the model ($B = .88$, $S.E. = .80$, $\beta = .18$, $t = 1.11$, $p = .279$). Only the indirect effect of reliance was significant (Standardized Indirect Effect = .23, $S.E. = .12$, 95% CI = [.03, .49]; Closeness: Standardized Indirect Effect = .06, $S.E. = .08$, 95% CI = [-.02, .37]; Trusting: Standardized Indirect Effect = .04, $S.E. = .06$, 95% CI = [-.03, .22]) (Figure 3).

Figure 3

The association between national relational mobility and national well-being was explained by how much people perceive they can rely on their close others. Log-transformed national GDP was controlled for.



Note. $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$.

Study 3 Discussion

In Study 3, we found that national levels of relational mobility were associated with national levels of well-being. This association was accounted for by the reported reliance on close others in nations with higher relational mobility. These findings suggest that individuals' perception of close others' social and emotional support critically contributes to individuals' well-being, above and beyond individuals' subjective feelings of closeness and levels of general trust in others.

General Discussion

Does the freedom to seek alternative relationships contribute to personal well-being? The present research investigated this question, providing evidence that perceiving greater relational mobility in one's social environment is associated with reporting having better relationships, which is in turn associated with reporting greater well-being. As indicated by prior research (Thomson et al., 2018; Yuki & Schug, 2012), the flexibility to start and end relationships may lead people to invest more in their existing relationships in order to keep their partners and friends from seeking out attractive alternatives; this extra investment may ultimately contribute to both improved relationships and well-being.

In Study 1, we found that the more relational mobility participants perceived in their environment, the better the quality of relationships they reported having with their best friend and closest family member, which in turn accounted for their reports of enhanced well-being. In Study 2, we diversified the measurements of well-being and assessed eudaimonic well-being and hedonic well-being separately. While relational mobility was associated with both aspects of well-being through enhanced quality of relationships, the effect was greater in the case of eudaimonic well-being, compared to hedonic well-being. We speculate that the freedom to choose new interpersonal relationships may co-occur with the freedom to make one's own choices and drive life purpose, which are key components of eudaimonic well-being.

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3 In Study 3, we expanded the scope of the research and examined whether national
4 differences in relational mobility could explain national differences in well-being. The more
5 relational mobility in a nation, the more likely people of that nation were to report greater well-
6 being. This association was explained by the increase in quality of relationships, including the
7 support people reported receiving from close others, above and beyond their reported
8 subjective closeness with others and general trust in others.
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16 In establishing these effects, the current work makes important contributions to multiple
17 areas of psychology. First, strengthening the prior research (Yuki & Schug, 2012), the current
18 findings address an important gap in the relationship literature regarding how social contexts
19 shape the functioning of relationships within a society (Clark, 2018), providing further insight to
20 advance relationship theory and research. For example, although people need to convince
21 others that they would be a good choice in a friendship or romantic relationship (Clark et al.,
22 2019), this need can depend on the society's relational mobility level. Second, this study
23 expands the scope of well-being research and demonstrates the significance of one's
24 surrounding environment in predicting one's well-being, over and above other traditionally
25 studied features such as stable personality traits and external financial circumstances.
26 Moreover, by exploring how social environment shapes interpersonal relationships and personal
27 well-being, we provide a detailed illustration of how external context and internal factors can
28 interact to impact well-being. Third, these findings inform our understanding of the mechanisms
29 that drive individual and national differences in well-being, highlighting potential avenues for
30 interventions aimed at enhancing societal well-being. Finally, this study builds on the rich
31 literature on the effect of interpersonal relationships on well-being, uncovering relational mobility
32 as a key factor for relationship quality.
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51 Importantly, these findings suggest that it is not the actual or immediate opportunity to
52 build (or end) relationships, nor any objectively measured quality of the relationships, but rather
53 the *perception* of having the opportunity in one's environment and the *subjective* evaluation of
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3 one's relationships, that is critical for well-being. Specifically, relational mobility measures the
4 opportunity that people see *others* in their immediate society having, not necessarily the
5 opportunity that people themselves actually have or see themselves as having. The relationship
6 quality measurements used in the current work also assess people's *perceptions* of relationship
7 quality; they are not objective indices. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that we included a number
8 of indices to probe different aspects of relationship quality, including perceived support from
9 others and subjective closeness with others. Moreover, in Studies 1 and 2, even after controlling
10 for the number of new friendships and acquaintanceships participants formed in the past month
11 and over the past three months, the effect of relational mobility on well-being persisted
12 (Supplementary Section 6). These findings indicate that one's subjective interpretation of one's
13 surrounding society, above and beyond one's actual social opportunities, contributed to one's
14 subjective sense of relationship quality and well-being. These findings also suggest that
15 cognitive interventions that train people to see greater opportunities for new relationships
16 around them may improve their well-being, even in the absence of actual changes to
17 environment.

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35 Important questions remain to be addressed in future work. For example, what is the
36 specific mechanism through which relational mobility influences relationship quality? As
37 suggested in prior research (Thomson et al., 2018), the threat of one's close others' looking for
38 other options can motivate people to invest more in their relationships, ultimately enhancing
39 relationship quality. Alternatively, in societies characterized by high relational mobility, people
40 may freely leave unsatisfying relationships and end up selectively maintaining only high-quality
41 relationships. In addition, while the current study demonstrates the associations between
42 relational mobility, relationship quality and well-being, the specific causal direction should be
43 further examined. For instance, although enhanced relationship quality in societies with higher
44 relational mobility may in turn increase well-being, it is also possible that enhanced individual
45 well-being in societies with higher relational mobility may facilitate having better quality of
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3 relationships. Following up individuals' approaches to changing or maintaining relationships
4 over the lifespan and across different societies would be crucial for addressing this question.
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7 Maintaining satisfying relationships with close others is critical for well-being. But, as we
8 have found, perceiving the freedom to start and end relationships may also crucially contribute
9 to well-being by affecting relationship quality. People who perceive their social partners as
10 having the freedom to choose alternatives report having better relationships and greater
11 personal well-being. Applying these findings to clinical and additional social settings may
12 uncover avenues both for appreciating what close others have to offer in the case of
13 interpersonal relationships and for increasing societal levels of well-being.
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For Peer Review