Social Relationships
Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Processes

Edited by
JOSEPH P. FORGAS
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SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
The Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology series

This book is Volume 10 in the Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology series. The aim of the Sydney Symposia of Social Psychology is to provide new, integrative insights into key areas of contemporary research. Held every year at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, each symposium deals with an important integrative theme in social psychology, and the invited participants are leading researchers in the field from around the world. Each contribution is extensively discussed during the symposium and is subsequently thoroughly revised into book chapters that are published in the volumes in this series. For further details see the website at www.sydneysymposium.unsw.edu.au

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SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
Cognitive, Affective, and Motivational Processes

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Introduction and Basic Principles
Evolutionary, Sociocultural, and Intrapsychic Influences on Personal Relationships
An Introductory Review
JOSEPH P. FORGAS AND JULIE FITNESS

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INTRODUCTION

The extraordinary importance of personal relationships to the health and happiness of human beings hardly can be overstated. From the time they are born, humans crave love and intimacy and the joy of knowing that they are valued and cherished by others. However, personal relationships are neither straightforward nor easy to understand and manage. Modern industrialized societies, with their emphasis on personal advancement, mobility, and adaptability, present a particularly challenging context for meaningful, long-term personal relationships to develop and flourish. Inevitably, people will experience rejection and loneliness at various times in their lives; close, loving relationships will sour and fall apart; relationship partners will experience discrepant needs and desires; and intentionally or not, relationship partners will hurt one another, neglect one another, and make one another miserable. Understanding how personal relationships are initiated, developed, maintained, and terminated is one of the core issues in psychology and is the subject matter of this book. In particular, contributions to the volume seek to explore and integrate the subtle influence that evolutionary, sociocultural, and intrapsychic (i.e., cognitive, affective, and motivational) variables play in relationship processes.

Despite their centrality to human existence, scientific interest in the whys and wherefores of personal relationships is relatively recent. Throughout much of psychology’s history as a distinct discipline it was tacitly assumed that lust, love, jealousy, hate, and the dynamics of relationship development and deterioration belonged to the nonscientific domain of poets, playwrights, and novelists. Over the past 30 years scientific research on the topic has undergone an explosive rate of growth, inspired by the pioneering work of social psychologists with a determination to demystify human relationships. International conferences dedicated to personal relationship topics and themes are held every year; various high-impact journals are committed to publishing quality relationship research (e.g., Personal Relationships; Journal of Social and Personal Relationships; Journal of Personality and Social Psychology), and there is now a growing number of handbooks, texts, and monographs on relationship research (e.g., Berscheid and Regan, 2005; Fletcher and Clark, 2001; Miller, Perlman, and Brehm, 2007; Noller and Feeney, 2006; Vangelisti and Perlman, 2006).

Unfortunately, however, there has also been a tendency in recent years for the study of relationships to become somewhat separated from the mainstream of research in social, cognitive, developmental, and clinical psychology. Further, it is becoming increasingly difficult to integrate all the theoretical and empirical developments in a field that now encompasses every conceivable aspect of relational structure (including families, friendships, and cyber romances) and process (including cognition, emotion, aggression, social support, and loneliness). The aim of the current volume is to present an integrative overview of the field by an international group of leading researchers who seek to survey the most dynamic and exciting recent developments in the social psychology of close relationships. Further, the current volume picks up a number of threads from the last volume specifically devoted to social psychological aspects of relationships (see Fletcher...
and Fitness, 1996) and provides an up-to-date forum where the most significant developments in the field during the past decade can be surveyed.

Rather than merely focusing on traditional research areas mainly concerned with well-established relationship processes, contributions to this volume also advocate an expanded theoretical approach that incorporates many of the insights gained from contemporary research in evolutionary psychology, social cognition, and research on affect and motivation. Several of the contributors to this volume are pioneers in the field of relationship research. Elaine Hatfield, for example, was one of the first to experimentally investigate the mysteries of interpersonal attraction, and she and her collaborators (including Ellen Berscheid) conducted some of the most original—and influential—work in the field. The idea of asking young experimental confederates to approach unknown men and women on a university campus and to ask if they would go to bed with them may seem challenging at first, but Clark and Hatfield’s (1989) work in the late 1970s and early 1980s demonstrated the existence of enduring gender differences in mating preferences that were largely consistent with the predictions of evolutionary social psychology (see also Chapter 3 in this volume).

The book is organized into three main sections. After this general introductory chapter by the editors, the first section considers some fundamental theoretical approaches and processes that inform contemporary relationship research, including historical and cultural perspectives on romantic love (Chapter 2), evolutionary influences on relationships (Chapter 3), the important role that personality and developmental factors play in relationships and patterns of attachment (Chapter 4), and cultural variations in attachment patterns (Chapter 5).

The second section of the book focuses on cognitive processes in social relationships and contains four chapters that explore the role of misrepresentations in relationships (Chapter 6), the influence of conscious reflections on relationship maintenance (Chapter 7), the role of attentional flexibility in promoting relationship quality (Chapter 8), and relational commitment as a factor in continuity and change in relationships (Chapter 9).

The third part of the book investigates the role of motivational and affective processes in relationships, such as the links between social identity and relationships (Chapter 10), the antecedents of negative affectivity in relationships (Chapter 11), and the effects of positive and negative moods on relationship cognition and behaviors (Chapter 12). Chapter 13 in this section discusses the role of approach and avoidance motives in close relationships, and Chapter 14 looks at competition and cooperation motives in sibling relationships.

The fourth and final part of the book focuses on the management of relationship problems and discusses punishment and forgiveness in close relationships (Chapter 15), variables influencing partner violence (Chapter 16), mechanisms of risk management in relationships (Chapter 17), the use of exclusion and ostracism in relationships (Chapter 18), and the consequences of paying attention to alternatives in close relationships (Chapter 19).

This introductory chapter in particular surveys the major themes covered in the book, highlights the links between the various chapters, and proposes future avenues for research in this area.
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

From the dawn of evolution, human beings mostly lived in small, close, face-to-face groups. From our earliest hunter-gatherer ancestors to life in small-scale villages that was dominant everywhere as recently as in the 18th century, human social relationships typically involved intimately known others, mostly members of our small, immediate group. The sophisticated ability of human beings to relate to each other is probably one of the cornerstones of the evolutionary success of our species and serves as the foundation of the increasingly complex forms of social organization we have been able to develop. Homo sapiens is a highly sociable species. The astounding development of our mental and cognitive abilities and our impressive record of achievements owe a great deal to the highly elaborate strategies we have developed for getting on with each other and coordinating our interpersonal relationships (Pinker, 1997). In fact, we might argue that the cognitive capacity to create and maintain complex relationships constitutes the essential “glue” that holds families, groups, and even whole societies together. However, this ancestral social environment has now almost completely disappeared from our lives. The 18th century brought with it a fundamental revolution in social relationships.

Several historical factors contributed to the rapid disappearance of traditional, face-to-face society and the fundamental change in human relatedness and social integration that occurred (Durkheim, 1956). The philosophy of the enlightenment laid the conceptual groundwork for the influential ideology of the liberated, self-sufficient, and mobile individual, freed from the restrictive influence of unalterable social norms and conventions. This ideology found its political expression in the French Revolution and the American Revolution. Industrialization produced large-scale dislocation and mobility and the reassembly of massive, socially disconnected working populations as required by technologies of mass production. These developments had crucial consequences for the way people related to each other.

In traditional, small-scale societies social relationships are typically long term, stable, and highly regulated. One’s place in society is largely determined by ascribed status and rigid norms. Mobility is restricted, and relationships mainly function at the direct, interpersonal level. Compare this with life in modern mass societies. Most people we encounter are strangers. Our position in society is flexible, personal anonymity is widespread, and mobility is high—yet we need the support and comfort provided by enduring social relationships more than ever. The fact that most people we deal with are not intimately known to us makes interpersonal behavior and relationship building and maintenance more difficult and problematic than ever before. It is perhaps not surprising that the emergence of psychology and social psychology as a science of interpersonal relationships has so clearly coincided with the advent of mass societies. For the first time, relating to each other—once a natural, automatic process almost entirely enacted within the confines of small, intimate, and enduring social communities—has become uncertain and problematic and, thus, an object of concern, reflection, and study (Goffman, 1972).

To relate to others, we now need to employ ever more sophisticated and elaborate cognitive and motivational strategies, and success is far from assured.
Evolutionary, Sociocultural, and Intrapsychic Influences

Emile Durkheim, the father of modern sociology, was among the first to identify a fundamental distinction between social relationships based on organic solidarity and those based on mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1956). The complex web of intense, everyday, face-to-face relationships and interactions that provide cohesion and unity to small-scale, primary social groups is on the wane. Modern mass societies function on the basis of indirect, impersonal, and disembodied networks of relationships that do not require face-to-face interaction. We now depend on, and are influenced by, strangers we never meet, and our relationships are increasingly regulated by rules and contractual expectations that are no longer based on personal contact or experience. The last few hundred years produced a form of social living that is profoundly different from the way human beings lived throughout previous millennia.

Our past evolutionary history could scarcely have prepared us for life in the kind of anonymous mass societies we now find ourselves in. Several of the chapters here discuss the kind of evolutionary (Chapter 3) and sociohistorical (Chapters 2 and 5) influences that continue to shape our relationship processes. Arguably, then, understanding the various ways that people relate to each other and the role of cognitive, motivational, and affective mechanisms in these processes has probably never been of greater importance than today. As modern industrialized societies become ever more complex and impersonal and as geographical, social, and demographic mobility increase exponentially, the ability to maintain stable, flourishing social relationships becomes an increasing complex and demanding task. The demands of relating to and interacting with people in such an environment call for ever more sophisticated and complex cognitive, affective, and motivational strategies, as several of the chapters here suggest (Chapters 7, 8, 10, and 12). It is not surprising, then, that there has been growing recent interest in the kind of symbolic, cognitive mechanisms that partners rely on to manage and maintain their relationships, a topic we shall turn to next.

Symbolic Processes in Relationships

The ability to construct accurate, reliable, and flexible symbolic cognitive representations and strategies about relationships is a critically important skill for relationship satisfaction and success. Several chapters in this volume explore the operation of such symbolic processes in relationships and investigate the functions of attentional flexibility (Chapter 8), identity processes (Chapter 10), reflections about the relationship (Chapter 7), as well as mood effects on relationship cognition (Chapter 12). It is interesting that the kind of close integration between the mental and the behavioral aspects of relationship strategies described here is by no means a new idea. Indeed, a number of classical social science theories have argued for precisely such an approach, emphasizing the close interdependence between symbolic mental processes and direct interpersonal behavior. Symbolic interactionism, a comprehensive theory of interpersonal behavior developed by George Herbert Mead (1934/1970), offers one important example of such an integrative framework for the study of social relationships. For Mead, social cognition and
social behavior were not distinct, separate domains of inquiry but were intrinsically related. Mead explicitly sought to reconcile the behaviorist and the phenomenologist, mentalistic approaches to psychology and argued that social relationships are only possible as a result of the symbolic representations and expectations formed by social actors as they experience interpersonal episodes. According to Mead, it is the uniquely human ability for symbolic representations allows us to abstract and internalize social experiences, and it is such mental models that are the key to understanding interpersonal behavior in general, and social relationship processes in particular.

A number of the chapters in this volume advocate just such an integration among cognitive, affective, and motivational mental processes and relationship behaviors, mirroring Mead’s (1934/1970) emphasis on symbolic representations in explaining behavior (e.g., Chapters 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10). It is perhaps unfortunate that symbolic interactionism has never become an influential theory within social psychology, probably because of the absence of suitable experimental methodologies for studying individual symbolic representations at the time. The currently dominant social cognitive paradigm has changed much of this, as it essentially deals with the same kinds of questions that were also of interest to Mead: How do the mental and symbolic representations that people form of their interpersonal encounters come to influence their social relationships? Recent social cognitive research has produced a range of ingenious techniques and empirical procedures that for the first time allow a rigorous empirical analysis of the links between mental representations and strategic behaviors (e.g., Bless and Forgas, 2000; Wegner and Gilbert, 2000). Several chapters included here provide excellent illustrations of how the merging of cognitive and behavioral approaches can give us important new insights into the nature of relationship phenomena (e.g., Chapters 12, 15, and 16).

Another important, yet frequently neglected, approach that could inform contemporary theorizing about social relationships is associated with the name of Max Weber. Weber always assumed a close and direct link between how an individual thinks about and cognitively represents social situations and their actual interpersonal behaviors. For Weber, it is mental representations and ideas about the social world that provide the crucial link between understanding individual behaviors and the operation of social and cultural systems. Weber assumes that shared individual beliefs and motivations—for example, the spreading acceptance of the protestant ethic—are the fundamental influence that ultimately shapes large-scale social structures and cultures as well as interpersonal behaviors and social relationships (Weber, 1947). Chapter 5 offers such an analysis linking relationship processes with their larger social and cultural context. Weber was also among the first to show that a clear understanding of social relationships must involve both the study of externally observable behavior as well as the subjectively perceived meanings that are attached to an action by the actor. In fact, Weber is one of the key originators of the kind of cognitive social psychological research that is becoming increasingly popular today and is also represented by contributions to this book, unifying the social cognitive approach with a concern with real-life interpersonal relationships as they exist within larger social systems.
Focused interest in the role of symbolic representations in interpersonal behavior has only emerged after social psychology has undergone something like a paradigmatic revolution during the "crisis" of the 1970s. With the emergence of the social cognitive paradigm, we now spend much more time studying the internal cognitive representations, thoughts, and motivations of social actors. During the past few decades social psychology has increasingly adopted an individualistic social cognitive paradigm that has mainly focused on the study of individual thoughts and motivations, often at the expense of studying real interactive behaviors and relationships (Forgas, 1981; Wegner and Gilbert, 2000). Although we have made major advances in understanding how people process information about the social world, insufficient attempts have been made to link such research on social cognition and motivation to an understanding of interpersonal behaviors and relationship processes. Thus, understanding relationship processes requires both paying attention to the thoughts, motivations, and feelings of social actors—their "mental world" (Bless and Forgas, 2000)—and linking this to understanding their actual interpersonal relationship behaviors. The proper focus of relationship research should be the analysis of the interaction between evolutionary and sociocultural factors and their influence on the mental (cognitive and affective) and the behavioral aspects of relationship processes. An important aim of this book (see especially Parts 2 and 3) is to provide an integrative review of how research on social cognition, affect, and motivation can contribute to our understanding of social relationships.

Although the contributions of Weber and Mead are rarely acknowledged by social psychologists, they nevertheless represent an important, if indirect, influence on our field. Their work demonstrates that our discipline has an impressive tradition of theorizing linking symbolic processes to social behaviors that is directly relevant to the objectives of this book. The same kinds of questions that occupied the minds of these authors continue to be reflected in the contributions to this volume. How do cultural and personality variables interact in influencing relationships (Chapter 5)? How do historical and cultural conceptions of love influence relationships experiences (Chapter 2)? What role does people’s quest for meaning, significance and identity play in relationships (Chapter 10)? How do differences in attentional focus (Chapter 8) and reflections about the relationship (Chapter 7) influence its progress?

THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS: A POTTED HISTORY

From these multifaceted beginnings, empirical relationship research emerged and progressed during the past three decades. In the early 1980s, a seminal volume on close relationships was published (Kelley et al., 1983) that set the research agenda for many years to come. Of the many extraordinary contributions to this volume, two in particular stand out: First, the detailed explications of interdependence theory; and second, Berscheid’s elegant application of interdependence theory to explain the elicitation of emotions in close relationship contexts. Interdependence
theory represented a revolution in the way social psychologists understood and thought about close relationships. Here, at last, was a way of understanding relational connectedness, not in terms of the extent to which people necessarily “liked” or even “loved” one another but in terms of their dependency on one another for desired outcomes. Indeed, interdependence theory is still one of the primary building blocks of relationship science, with its capacity to account for relationship closeness and commitment in terms of cognitive and behavioral interdependence. It led directly to work on accommodation by Caryl Rusbult and colleagues (e.g., Rusbult, Yovetich, and Verette, 1996) and inspired the research programs of relationship scholars such as Jeff Simpson, Eli Finkel, and Chris Agnew, all of whom are represented in the current volume.

Along with interdependence theory, another extraordinarily influential and integrative model of close relationship functioning to emerge in the 1980s was adult attachment theory. First introduced in a landmark paper by Hazan and Shaver (1987), this theory encompasses virtually every level of relationship functioning, from the evolutionary through to the cognitive, developmental, emotional, motivational, behavioral, and social levels. It is certainly the closest we have yet come to a unified theory of human relationship functioning, and as several contributions in the current volume demonstrate (Chapters 4, 5, 11), attachment theory continues to be a source of significant ideas and innovative research in the field.

The exciting developments in the social psychology of close relationships were further highlighted in two edited volumes in the 1990s (Fletcher and Fincham, 1991; Fletcher and Fitness, 1996). The impetus for these volumes arose from the work of researchers with a particular interest in symbolic, social cognitive processes as they impact close relationships. Fletcher and Fincham, for example, turned their attention to the ways in which relationship partners attempt to explain and account for each other’s behaviors (i.e., their causal attributions). These researchers developed multifaceted programs of research on the ways relationship partners’ causal attributions impacted their relationship satisfaction. In particular, two attributional “styles”—relationship-enhancing and distress-maintaining—were identified and examined for their capacity to maintain cycles of positive and negative partner interactions, with correspondingly adaptive and maladaptive outcomes for relationships. Fletcher (2002; see also Chapter 6) also developed models of cognitive processing in relationships that took explicit account of the distal origins of relationship partners’ attributions (e.g., their schemas, or beliefs about the relationship, including their attachment schemas) and the ways these schemas shape attributions and judgments of partner behavior in the current, or proximal, interactional context.

We would strongly argue for the utility of this social cognitive model as a framework for exploring a rich diversity of relationship phenomena (see also previous section). Such research has included, for example, studies exploring the impact of mood effects on various aspects of relationship cognition, including judgments and memories (e.g., Forgas, 1996); research on cognitive biases and illusions and their impact on relationship happiness (e.g., Murray and Holmes, 1996; see also Chapters 8, 9, and 17 in this volume), gender and thought in close relationships (e.g., Acitelli and Young, 1996; see also Chapter 7 in this volume), and the impact of
Evolutionary, SoCioCultural, and intraPSyChiC influEnCES
distal schemas such as attachment models on relationship partners’ cognitions and emotions in the proximal context (e.g., Shaver, Collins, and Clark, 1996; see also Chapter 4 in this volume). The current volume contains several contributions that build on these earlier approaches. Clearly, and as noted by Fletcher and Fitness (1996, p. xii), the social psychological approach to relationships is an “exceptionally fruitful one,” and, some 11 years later, we would argue on the strength of the chapters in the current volume that this is still the case.

CURRENT RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The field of relationship research has come a long way since the initial work on interpersonal attraction. Indeed, and as Berscheid (2006, p. ix) noted, relationship science is currently “a nova in the heavens of the social, behavioral and biological sciences.” Methodologies are becoming increasingly sophisticated, with several researchers involved in large-scale, longitudinal projects that track the development of affection and disaffection over time. The range of topics that now comes under the purview of relationship research is also enormous. For example, in their recently published Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships, Vangelisti and Perlman (2006) listed a truly daunting number of topics, including relationship development, personality, attachment, gender, communication, social cognition, emotion, physiology, self-disclosure, social support, conflict, sexuality, loneliness, stress, lying, temptations, violence, satisfaction, love, commitment, intimacy, social networks, culture, and the Internet. Several of these topics are represented in the current volume, but as noted previously, it was never our aim to provide a comprehensive review of every imaginable aspect of relationship research. Rather, this volume comprises chapters from social psychologists who share a fascination with the interaction among the evolutionary, sociocultural, and symbolic (cognitive, affective, and motivational) aspects of close relationships and who are currently exploring some of the most interesting of these phenomena.

Indeed, one of the more striking developments in social psychology in general (see Forgas, Haselton, and von Hippel, 2007) and relationship research over the past two decades has been the growing acceptance of an explicitly evolutionary underpinning to a variety of relationship processes (e.g., see Miller, Perlman, and Brehm (2007) for an example of this approach in an undergraduate text; and Fletcher (2002) for a theoretically integrative book on intimate relationships written for educated lay readers). Again, research on interpersonal attraction and mate selection has been at the forefront of this development, with an explosion of theory and research appearing in the literature from anthropologists, biologists, and neuroscientists as well as social psychologists.

In our view, this is a welcome development, with a growing recognition among relationship scholars that evolutionary and social psychological models of relationship processes are not incompatible but, rather, represent different levels of explanation and understanding (see also Fitness, Fletcher, and Overall, 2003). Evolutionary approaches look to the distant past to explain the origins of relational phenomena such as sexual attraction, mate selection, love, lust, and relationship conflict. Their
central tenet is that we are the end products of a long line of successful reproducers and that the mating preferences, desires, emotions, and motivations that have worked for us in the past are now an intrinsic part of the “intimate relationship mind” (Fletcher, 2002). Social psychologists, on the other hand, are interested in the ways evolved psychological mechanisms (e.g., the attachment system; emotions like love and jealousy) shape relationship cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in the proximal context. They are also concerned with the roles played by these proximal variables in adaptive and maladaptive relationship functioning over time. The willingness of relationship researchers, both to accommodate and to actively seek to integrate the two approaches, adds immeasurably to our understanding of a variety of relationship phenomena at a number of levels. Indeed, one need look no further than attachment theory to appreciate the theoretical richness and heuristic value of such an integrative approach.

Finally, another important development in the field that has been identified by a number of scholars (e.g., Miller, Perlman, and Brehm, 2007; Perlman and Duck, 2006) concerns the recent growth of interest in the so-called dark side of relationships, including betrayal, rejection, revenge, sexual coercion, relational violence, ostracism, and relationship dissolution and loss. This development is an indication of the evolution of the field of relationship research itself—that it is moving beyond global, catch-all constructs like relationship conflict in favor of more fine-grained analyses of particular kinds of aversive behaviors that are characterized by particular kinds of motivations, cognitions, emotions, and outcomes, and with particular kinds of dysfunctional impacts on relationships at different stages of development. Several of these dark and painful aspects of relationships are represented in the current volume (e.g., Chapters 15, 16, 19). On the other hand, it is also important to note the growing interest among relationship researchers in explicitly positive aspects of relationships, such as compassionate love, forgiveness, and gratitude (e.g., see Mikulincer, Shaver, and Slav, 2006; see also Chapter 15 in this volume).

In summary, theory and research in the social psychology of human relationships are thriving. The scope of enquiry is broadening all the time, with researchers increasingly moving beyond romantic relationships to consider the dynamics of familial relationships, friendships, and even cyber relationships. Much of the research being conducted today is buttressed by strong theory, innovative methods, and advanced data analytic techniques. The chapters in this volume represent the most recent developments in the field and seek to provide an integrative analysis of how evolutionary, sociocultural, and symbolic, intrapersonal (cognitive, affective, and motivational) variables interact in influencing relationship behaviors and outcomes. Together they provide a state-of-the-art picture of what we currently understand about the nature and functioning of human relationships and where we need to direct our future investigations.

**OUTLINE OF THE BOOK**

The chapters featured in this book were selected to represent a broad a cross-section of contemporary relationship research and to identify integrative themes
Evolutionary, SoCioCultural, and intraPSyChiC influEnCEs across a number of key domains. Contributions are arranged into three sections: chapters that deal with fundamental theoretical and methodological issues relevant to social relationship research (Part 1); chapters that explore the role of mental representations and cognitive processes in relationships (Part 2); chapters that discuss the influence of affective and motivational factors in relationships (Part 3); and chapters that discuss the maintenance, management, and problems in personal relationships (Part 4).

**Part 1: Social Relationships—Basic Principles and Fundamental Processes**

The first part of the book presents chapters that illustrate some of the basic approaches that inform relationship research. Perhaps one of the major gaps in current relationship research is the neglect of cross-cultural work on relationship structures and processes. An explicit consideration of history and culture is particularly important if one wishes to make strong explanatory claims about the evolutionary underpinnings of relationship processes such as falling in and out of love, relationship maintenance, and relationship dissolution. Clearly, culture and evolution work together in shaping the features and functions of human relationships. This perspective is represented in Chapters 2 and 5. Chapter 2 explores passionate love and sexual desire from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, including historical and cross-cultural. This chapter notes that passionate love is recognized in all cultures and has a long and robust history—that passion and lust are universal feelings but that passion is also a biological phenomenon, with corresponding and identifiable brain activation when people think about their beloved. The authors also note, however, that romantic love has not always and everywhere been accepted the basis of long-term partner choices, and they chart fascinating historical changes in our conception of love.

Chapter 3 offers an insightful analysis of relationship processes from an evolutionary perspective. The authors point out that fundamental aspects of the way human beings relate to each other can be understood in terms of evolutionary pressures that influence human mating preferences and regulate the development of long-term bonds so as to maximize reproductive fitness. In particular, the problems and advantages associated with long-term commitment and the establishment of romantic bonds is analyzed in terms of the benefits such bonds convey in terms of parental care and offspring survival. Love in particular, from this perspective, can be seen as an effective commitment device that helps to prevent partners from exploring attractive short-term mating opportunities for the sake of long-term benefits. The chapter suggests that the experience of love probably evolved to help humans form and maintain committed and monogamous pair bonds that are of greatest benefit to their offspring.

Another fundamental approach to understanding relationship behaviors is offered by attachment theory, and Chapter 4 describes how the availability of caring, supportive relationships beginning in infancy can be critically important to developing a sense of attachment security and the formation of mutually satisfying
intimate relationships throughout life. Research suggests that dispositional security functions as a resilience resource and that interactions with loving and caring relationship partners help to further enhance and increase attachment security, with beneficial effects for mental health. The authors present interesting longitudinal findings showing that being involved in a relationship with a supportive romantic partner, coworker, or colleague has long-term beneficial effects on feelings, adjustment, and personality. These findings offer new evidence suggesting the flexibility and responsiveness of the attachment system across the lifespan and the benefits of secure attachment patterns.

In Chapter 5, which explores the fundamental patterns of relatedness across cultures, genders, ages, and relationship statuses, the author discusses evidence from his International Sexuality Description Project—a survey study of more than 17,000 people from 56 nations—showing that secure romantic attachment is “normative” in a majority of cultures. In contrast, insecure romantic attachments are associated with stressful ecological environments, a finding that supports various evolutionary theories of the development of human sexuality. Interestingly, the degree of gender differentiation in romantic attachment was associated with high-stress and high-fertility reproductive environments, again consistent with evolutionary theories of human sexuality (see Chapter 3). National differences in gender equality, however, were not related to gender differences in attachment. The chapter also presents intriguing empirical evidence supporting the links between attachment styles and some health-related behaviors, including antisocial personality traits, risky sexual behaviors, domestic violence, and sexual coercion.

**Part 2: Cognitive Processes in Social Relationships**

The chapters in this section focus on the role of symbolic, cognitive processes in relationships. In the first chapter in this section, Chapter 6, the authors deal with the fascinating question, Is love blind? They take a social-cognitive approach and explore the question of bias and inaccuracy in intimate relationships in terms of cognitive theories of bias, rationality, and errors in social cognition. Interestingly, it seems that individuals in intimate relationships are sometimes quite aware of positive biases in their judgments and can even estimate their magnitude reasonably accurately. The chapter suggests that accuracy in social relationship judgments can be measured and consists of two independent qualities: (1) tracking accuracy; and (2) bias accuracy. Further, accuracy is influenced by a number of important and interacting variables such as gender, situational contexts, the nature of the relationship, the nature of the judgment, and relationship goals. Under some conditions, individuals seem to possess good meta-awareness of the extent to which they or their partners produce accurate or inaccurate relationship judgments.

The role of awareness and reflections about one’s own relationship is explored in Chapter 7. Relationship awareness may include actions such as thinking and talking about the relationship, making comparisons and contrasts between partners and representing the relationship as an entity. It seems that relationship awareness may be related to romantic relationship satisfaction. However, this link partly depends on gender and emotional tone of interactions. An implicit aspect
of relationship awareness is thinking about the self as part of a couple, and such "couple identity" may influence the way a partner interprets a couple's interactions and circumstances. Couple identity may be instrumental in how partners resolve disagreements and cope with stressors. Relationship awareness may be analyzed in terms of a number of well-documented cognitive mechanisms such as controlled versus automatic processing, relationship schemas, and cognitive inter-dependence, suggesting a number of exciting new avenues for research on relationship cognition.

In Chapter 8, closely related to Chapter 7 and also looking at symbolic processes, the authors analyze the role of different attentional foci on relationship dynamics. A person's focus can be on the self, on one's partner, the activities in which the partners are engaged, or the self and partner as a unit as perceived by third parties. The authors suggest that having a flexible, adaptable focus of attention is beneficial for relationship functioning. For example, when one's own needs and the partner opportunities are high, focus should be on the self and on how a partner may provide support. When partner needs or opportunities are high, focus should shift to the partner. When needs are low, relationship functioning can be optimized by minimizing focus on the self or partner but instead focusing on joint leisure task or exploratory activities. The ability to maintain a flexible focus of attention in relationships seems beneficial for well-being and also provides positive memories that accumulate and form the basis of the experience of having a good, supportive relationship. The attentional focus approach described here is contrasted with the common tendency in this field to focus on self-needs to the relative exclusion of partner needs. Flexible attentional focus also influences how the relationship and the partners are viewed by outsiders.

Symbolic commitment to a relationship is the focus of Chapter 9, which suggests that relationships may be characterized in terms of continuous changes in how partners represent and interpret their relationships. Relationship representations may morph from one type to another, such as from a steady romantic relationship to a friendship. The chapter examines how people may construct relationship alternatives with others as well as alternative forms of a relationship with their current partner. Thoughts about alternative forms of a relationship and commitment to the current type of relationship are closely linked, and satisfaction level may depend on how a relationship is currently is defined (e.g., a romantic partnership). Past investments often guide the decision whether to continue in a relationship of any type with a given partner. Subjective norms also impact what partners perceive as the kind of relationship most supported by significant others. The chapter offers a rich analysis of the multifaceted ways that symbolic and representational processes about relationship types may influence satisfaction.

Part 3: Motivational and Affective Processes in Relationships

The quest for positive and identity and optimal distinctiveness within a social group is a powerful social motive, yet, as Chapter 10 points out, little has been done to link the large literatures on social identity (collective belonging) close relationships (dyadic belonging). One interesting question is whether these two
mechanisms of belonging represent alternative, or complementary, bases for connecting to others. Can acceptance by a large social group compensate for the absence of close relationships and vice versa? The author of Chapter 10 argues that close personal relationships and close identification with a social group represents two distinct motivational systems, each characterized by the need to achieve optimal distinctiveness, creating a tension between opposing motives for immersion with others and for differentiation from others. The chapter presents a range of empirical findings supporting the separate-systems view. The role of cultural variables, such as individualism and collectivism, in facilitating group “belonging” or dyadic “belonging” motivations is also discussed.

Chapter 11 examines the intriguing prediction based on attachment theory that interpersonal experiences and events that occurred at three pivotal points in a person’s social development—infancy/early childhood, early elementary school, and the teenage years—may predict patterns of positive versus negative emotions people experience with their romantic partners in their early 20s. Their longitudinal study confirmed that participants who were classified as securely attached at the age of 12 months were rated as more socially competent during early elementary school by their classroom teachers. This in turn predicted having more secure relationships with close friends at age 16, which in turn predicted more positive daily experiences of emotion in their adult romantic relationships. These results suggest that early influences on personality and relationship-relevant motivational patterns may come to influence interpersonal experiences, emotions, and relationship quality in later life.

In Chapter 12, on the impact of mood in close relationship contexts, the author argues that affect is a defining feature of social relationships and has an important influence on many relationship judgments and behaviors. Drawing on the Affect Infusion Model (AIM; Forgas, 2002), the chapter argues that temporary moods influence both the cognitive content (valence) and the processing strategies people rely on when dealing with relationship-relevant information. A range of studies show that people in a positive mood form more optimistic judgments, impressions, and attributions about their relationships and relationship problems than do people in a negative mood, as long as the task required some degree of open, constructive processing that allows the infusion of affectively primed ideas into the response. In addition, it also seems that mild negative mood triggers a more accommodative, concrete processing style that has distinct benefits for various strategic relationship behaviors, such as social influence strategies (Forgas, 2007). These mood effects are consistent with other research suggesting that positive moods promote a less attentive and more schematic thinking style, while negative moods facilitate more focused and more attentive thinking strategies.

Chapter 13 looks at the interplay of approach and avoidance motives in close relationships. As relationships function as powerful sources of both pleasure and pain, the motivation to maintain close relationships may include positive motives such companionship, love, and intimacy, but avoidance motives (avoiding potential threats, such as rejection, conflict, and betrayal) also play a role. The motives and goals people have in their close relationships are rarely balanced and can be focused either on incentives and desired end states (i.e., approach), or they can
be focused on the threats and undesired end states (i.e., avoidance). Approach
and avoidance goals in turn influence attention, interpretation of partners’
behavior, memory, affective experiences, and actual behavior. Diary studies con-
firmed that such goals influence individuals’ behaviors toward their partners,
their interpretation of their partners’ behaviors during daily interactions, and
relationship satisfaction.

Chapter 14 looks at sibling relationships, the longest relationship most of us ever
experience and one that clearly involves an attachment bond, strong motivational
states, with strong influences on psychological adjustment. As siblings often compete
within the family, competition and comparison are highly salient for them. Parental
favoritism affects both the psychological adjustment of the disfavored sibling and the
relationship between the siblings. The author of the chapter explores the impact of
ongoing comparisons on sibling relationships in adolescence and young adulthood,
looking at both nontwins and twins. Based on the Self-Evaluation Maintenance
Model, empirical findings suggest that siblings react most strongly when they are
outperformed by their sibling on an activity of high relevance to their self-concept.
The emotional reactions of twins in situations of competition and comparison also
depend on age, birth order, and attachment security.

Part 4: Managing Relationship Problems

The final fourth section of the book explores the way people manage and cope with
adverse situations and relationship problems. Chapter 15 discusses how processes
of punishment and forgiveness operate in close relationships. Although punishment
is often thought of as antithetical to forgiveness, in fact forgiveness involves “giving
up the right to punish.” Research on forgiveness in marriage found that punish-
ment plays an intrinsically important role in victims’ forgiveness of partner offences.
The chapter surveys the literature on forgiveness in close relationships and dis-
cusses forgiveness process from an evolutionary perspective. Recent data of punish-
ment and forgiveness in marital relationships are discussed, and the chapter draws
explicitly on theoretical insights from evolutionary social psychology. In particular,
the chapter argues that the urge to retaliate is “hard-wired” and that punishing
relationship partners for perceived transgressions can sometimes serve adaptive
relationship functions (e.g., emotional communication; behavioral deterrence).

Actual violence between intimate partners represents an extreme form of rela-
tionship dysfunction. Chapter 16 presents a three-stage process analyzing how a
previously nonviolent interaction between intimate partners may escalate into vio-
ence. The first stage involves the experience of an instigating concern by one of
the partners. The second stage features the experience of strong violence-impelling
forces, which lead the individual to experience action tendencies toward violence.
The third stage refers to the presence or absence of violence-inhibiting force; its
absence leaves the partner with little ability or motivation to override violent action
tendencies. Empirical work shows that several different violence-impelling forces
may interact with one central violence-inhibiting force—expectations of negative
consequences—to predict violence. Each violence-impelling force predicts vio-
ence for individuals who did not expect negative consequences, but there was no
such relationship for individuals who strongly expected negative consequences. These results suggest that we need to place greater emphasis on examining the mechanisms by which individuals restrain themselves from engaging in violent behavior toward their partner.

Chapter 17 outlines a model of risk regulation in relationships, explaining how people balance the goal of seeking closeness against the opposing goal of minimizing the pain of rejection (see also Chapter 13 on a somewhat related theme). The risk regulation system seeks to optimize the sense of assurance and safety in one’s level of dependence in the relationship—a feeling of relative invulnerability to hurt. The risk regulation system consists of three interconnected if–then contingency rules, one cognitive (“if dependent then gauge acceptance or rejection”), one affective (“if accepted or rejected then internalize”), and one behavioral (“if accepted or rejected then regulate dependence”). The central question for partners is to decide whether it is safe to put self-protection aside and take the risk of seeking dependence and connectedness. The chapter describes how perceptions of a partner’s regard influence the relevance of these three if–then rules in risky situations.

Pursuing the theme of relationship risks and punishment, Chapter 18, on relational ostracism, explores the effects of ostracism (the so-called silent treatment) in close relationships. Drawing on both qualitative data and an innovative experimental paradigm involving a form of symbolic ostracism, the authors demonstrate the potency of ostracism as a form of punishment that is often interpreted as a form of partner betrayal that erodes trust in the relationship. The empirical work reviewed here consists of two different paradigms. First, interviews with individuals produced qualitative data about experiences of relational ostracism by spouses or family members. Second, research looking at laboratory-induced ostracism by a partner demonstrated serious consequences for relationships such as feelings of betrayal and loss of trust.

The final chapter looks at one of the most ancient and ubiquitous relationship problems: the availability of alternative partners. The awareness of, and attentiveness to, enticing alternative partners can impact on current relationships and is a key influence on how alternatives influence current relational commitment. Interest in alternatives undermines commitment to one’s partner, and attentiveness is often a better predictor of the short-term future of romantic relationships than are more common measures such as satisfaction and investment. Attentiveness varies over time and is inversely related to current contentment. It is likely that motivated inattention to alluring alternatives can protect a present partnership. Attentiveness to alternatives is a new, promising construct that may have significant predictive value when it comes to understanding how partners respond to relationship problems.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding how people initiate, maintain, manage, and terminate personal relationships has long been one of the key tasks of social psychology and remains
one of the most important questions for social science to deal with. Contemporary industrial societies present a particularly challenging context for rewarding and flourishing social relationships, and the symbolic and cognitive strategies of relationship partners play a critical role in relationship success and failure, as several of the chapters here demonstrate. With the adoption of a much more cognitive orientation in social psychology during the last few decades, interest in relationship cognition is one of most rapidly developing domains in relationship research. We have seen that intrapsychic processes, such as cognitive, motivational, and affective strategies, play a key role in relationship behaviors and relationship outcomes. However, these mechanisms cannot be properly understood without paying close attention to the evolutionary, social, and historical contexts within which relationships function. In their various ways, contributions to this book illustrate that there is much to be gained from an integration of the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral approaches to relationship research with recent advances in our understanding of sociocultural and evolutionary influences on relationships. As editors, we hope that readers will find these contributions as exciting and intriguing as we did, and we hope that collecting them in one volume will stimulate further interest in the scientific study of human social relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by an Australian Professorial Fellowship by the Australian Research Council, by the Research Prize by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to Joseph P. Forgas, and by an Australian Research Council grant to Julie Fitness.

REFERENCES


The Sumerians invented writing around 3500 BCE. Buried among the Sumerians’ clay tablets is inscribed history’s first known love poems—a poem dedicated to King Shu-Sin by one of his chosen brides. She said, “Bridegroom, let me caress you/My precious caress is more savory than honey” (Arsu, 2006). Passion and desire evidently possess a very long lineage.
Defining Passionate Love

Poets, novelists, and social commentators have proposed numerous definitions of passionate love. We accept this one:

A state of intense longing for union with another. Passionate love is a complex functional whole including appraisals or appreciations, subjective feelings, expressions, patterned physiological processes, action tendencies, and instrumental behaviors. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy. Unrequited love (separation) with emptiness, anxiety, or despair. (Hatfield and Rapson, 1993, p. 5)

The Passionate Love Scale (PLS) was designed to assess the cognitive, physiological, and behavioral indicants of such love (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986). It has been translated into a variety of languages—including Farsi, German, Indian, Indonesian, Korean, Peruvian, Spanish, and Swedish (Kim and Hatfield, 2004; Lundqvist, 2006).

This chapter reviews what scholars from a variety of disciplines—social psychology, cross-cultural psychology, anthropology, history, neuroscience, physiology, and evolutionary psychology—have discovered about the nature of passionate love and sexual desire.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

Americans are preoccupied with love—or so cross-cultural observers once claimed. In a famous quip, Linton (1936, p. 175) mocked Americans for their naïve idealization of romantic love and the assumption that it was a prerequisite to marriage:

All societies recognize that there are occasional violent, emotional attachments between persons of opposite sex, but our present American culture is practically the only one which has attempted to capitalize these, and make them the basis for marriage.... The hero of the modern American movie is always a romantic lover, just as the hero of the old Arab epic is always an epileptic. A cynic may suspect that in any ordinary population the percentage of individuals with a capacity for romantic love of the Hollywood type was about as large as that of persons able to throw genuine epileptic fits.

Throughout the world, a spate of commentators have echoed Linton’s claim that passionate love is a peculiarly Western institution (Hatfield and Rapson, 1996; Murstein, 1974). Yet such confident assertions are wrong.

People in all cultures have recognized the power of passionate love. In Australian aboriginal literature, for example, the tale is told of twin sisters, both named Mar-rallang, who fell in love with Wy-young-gurrie. The trio defied traditional taboos and married. Powerful tribal leaders tried to separate them with “truth, inexorable law, and raging fire” but failed. There are also the “Dreamings”
of Lintyipilinti, who chanted love songs and sent a magical bird to a woman who turned out to be his mother-in-law; as punishment for breaking a Jungarrayi taboo, the two lovers were turned to stone (Unaipon, 2001).

Today, most anthropologists agree that passionate love is a universal experience, transcending culture and time (Buss, 1994; Hatfield and Rapson, 1996; Jankowiak, 1995; Tooby and Cosmides, 1992). Jankowiak and Fischer (1992), for example, proposed that both passion and lust are universal feelings. Drawing on a sampling of tribal societies from Murdock and White’s (1969) Standard Cross-Cultural Sample, they found that in almost all societies, young lovers talked about passionate love, recounted tales of love, sang love songs, and spoke of the longings and anguish of infatuation. When passionate affections clashed with parents’ or elders’ wishes, young couples often eloped.

Recently, evolutionary psychologists have begun to devote a great deal of effort to unraveling the genetic and evolutionary underpinnings of love, sexual desire, and long-term companionate commitments (see Buss, 1994; Hatfield and Lieberman, 2006; Lieberman, Tooby, and Cosmides, 2007; and Chapters 3 and 15 in this volume). Passionate love and sexual desire, then, appear to be cultural universals.

NEUROSCIENCE AND BIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Recently, social psychologists, neuroscientists, and physiologists have begun to explore the links among love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior.

The first neuroscientists to study passionate love were Birbaumer and his Tübingen colleagues (1993). They concluded (on the basis of their electroencephalogram [EEG] assessments) that passionate love was “mental chaos.” More recently, Bartels and Zeki (2000) (using functional magnetic resonance imaging [fMRI] techniques) attempted to identify the brain regions associated with passionate love. They put up posters around London, advertising for men and women who were “truly, deeply, and madly in love.” Several ethnic groups and 70 young men and women from 11 countries responded. All scored high on the PLS. Seventeen men and women were rolled into an fMRI scanner. This high-tech mind-reader constructs an image of the brain in which changes in blood flow (induced by brain activity) are represented as color-coded pixels. Bartels and Zeki gave each person a photograph of their beloved to gaze at, alternating the beloved’s picture with other friends with whom he or she was not in love. They then digitally subtracted the scans taken while the subjects viewed the “friends” pictures from those taken while they viewed their “beloved” pictures, creating images that represented the brain regions that became more (or less) active when people viewed their beloved’s picture. These images, the researchers argued, show the brain regions involved when a person experiences passionate love.

Bartels and Zeki (2000) discovered that passion sparked increased activity in the brain areas associated with euphoria and reward and decreased levels of activity in the areas associated with sadness, anxiety, and fear. Activity seemed to be restricted to foci in the medial insula and the anterior cingulated cortex and, subcortically, in the caudate nucleus, and the putamen, all bilaterally. Most of the
regions that were activated during the experience of romantic love have previously been shown to be active while people are under the influence of euphoria-inducing drugs such as opiates or cocaine. Apparently, both passionate love and those drugs activate a “blessed-out” circuit in the brain. The anterior cingulated cortex has also been shown to become active when people view sexually arousing material. This makes sense since passionate love and sexual desire are generally thought to be “kissing cousins.”

Among the regions whose activity decreased during the experience of love were zones previously implicated in the areas of the brain controlling critical thought and in the experience of painful emotions such as sadness, anger, and fear. Bartels and Zeki (2000) argued that once we get close to someone, there is less need to critically assess their character and personality. (In that sense, love may indeed be “blind.”) Deactivations were also observed in the posterior cingulated gyrus and in the amygdala and were right-lateralized in the prefrontal, parietal, and middle temporal cortices. The authors also found passionate love and sexual arousal to be tightly linked.

Other psychologists who have studied passionate love and sexual desire (using fMRI techniques) have found roughly similar (but not identical) results (Aron et al., 2005; Fisher, Aron, and Brown, 2006). Fisher (2007), for example, argued that love is a drug:

The ventral tegmental area is a clump of cells that make dopamine, a natural stimulant, and sends it out to many brain regions when one is in love. It’s the same region affected when you feel the rush of cocaine.

This is only one half of the equation, of course. In the preceding research, the couples were happily in love. But love is often unrequited. What kind of brain activity occurs when people have been rejected and, as our definition implies, are feeling anxiety, anger, emptiness, or despair?

In a recent study, Fisher and her colleagues (Fisher, Aron, and Brown, 2006) studied men and women who had been wildly in love but had just been jilted by their beloved. They were feeling rejection, rage, and despair. Preliminary fMRI analysis indicated that rejected lovers display greater activity in the nucleus accumbens, the insular cortex, and the lateral orbitofrontal cortex. Jilted lovers’ brains now light up in the areas associated with addiction, with taking big risks, and with anxiety, pain, obsessive/compulsive behaviors, and attempts at controlling anger. Alas, other neuroscientists who have studied the fMRI responses of lovers who were actively grieving over a recent romantic breakup found very different results (Najib et al., 2004). Perhaps we are back to Birbaumer and his colleagues’ (1993) initial observation that “love is mental chaos”—and the pain of rejection is doubly chaotic.

In parallel with this fMRI research, a number of social psychologists, neurobiologists, and physiologists have begun to explore the neural and chemical substrates of passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual behavior (Carter, 1998; Komisaruk and Whipple, 1998; Marazziti and Canale, 2004; Marazziti et al., 1999). Their results seem to fit nicely with the preceding work on romantic love.
Psychologists may differ on whether romantic and passionate love are or are not emotions (Diamond, 2004; Fisher, 2006; Gonzaga et al., 2006; Shaver, Morgan, and Wu, 1996) and whether passionate love, sexual desire, and sexual motivation are closely related constructs (both neurobiologically and physiologically) or very different in their natures (Bartels and Zeki, 2000; Beck, Bozman, and Qualtrough, 1991; Diamond, 2004; Fisher, 2006; Hatfield and Rapson, 1987; Regan and Berscheid, 1999.) Nonetheless, this path-breaking neuroscience and neurobiological research, though in its early stages, has the potential to answer age-old questions as to the nature of love and human sexuality.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Passionate love is as old as humankind. The Sumerian love poem that began this chapter dated from 3500 BCE. The Sumerian love fable, telling of Inanna and Dumuzi, was spun by tribal storytellers in 2000 BCE (Wolkstein, 1991). The world literature abounds in stories of lovers caught up in a sea of passion and violence: Daphnis and Chloe (Greek myths), Shiva and Sati (Indian), Hinemoa and Tutanekai (Maori), Emperor Ai and Dong Xian (Chinese), and the VhaVhenda lover who was turned into a crocodile (African).

Although passionate love and sexual desire have always existed, they were rarely encouraged. Throughout history, most cultures and the political and religious authorities that held power viewed passionate lovers’ primitive and powerful feelings as a threat to the social, political, and religious order, and thus they endeavored to suppress such dangerous feelings. In the West, during the early Christian era, for instance, suppression was especially harsh. For 1,500 years—from the earliest days of the Roman Catholic Church to the 16th-century Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation—the Church proclaimed passionate love and sex (even marital sex) for any purpose other than procreation to be a mortal sin, punishable by eternal damnation (Gay, 1984). In those early days, love was not expected to end well. Romeo and Juliet, Ophelia and Hamlet, Abelard and Eloise did not make love, get married, have two children, and live happily ever after. Juliet stabbed herself. Romeo swallowed poison. Ophelia went mad and died. Hamlet was felled by a poisoned sword point. Peter Abelard (a real person) was castrated and his beloved Eloise retired to a nunnery. (In Japan, love suicides have been an institution since the end of the 17th century.)

In the West, after 1500, all that began to change—albeit slowly. Large transformations followed in the wake of the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution. The rest of the world has not escaped these deep currents of change, and consequently the non-West has begun to “Westernize.” Perhaps the major theme in world history over the past 500 years has been the rise of the West and the subsequent Westernization of the rest of the world, and that includes psychological dimensions as well as economic, political, and technological ones.

What do historians mean by Westernization? It has meant an increasing insistence on individualism, the desirability of the goal of personal happiness and the reduction of pain, and a metamorphosis in Euro-American approaches to love and
sex. The West initiated such ideas and practices (among many) as marriage for love (as opposed to arranged marriage); egalitarian families (as opposed to patriarchal, hierarchical arrangements); the high value placed on romantic and passionate love, including the possibility that love affairs did not have to end in castration and suicide; sexual freedom for both men and women; the movement toward gender equality; and childhood considered as a separate phase of the life cycle with children deserving special treatment (as opposed to treating very young children as miniature adults sent out to farm the fields as soon as they could walk). By 1800, the West had been significantly transformed by these ideas. Slowly after that, the rest of the world would commence to follow suit.

One particularly intriguing and important phenomenon: it has taken the West over 500 years (from the Renaissance into the present) to even approach accepting such “modern” homegrown ideas about love, sex, and intimacy. In non-Western cultures, however, historians have been observing that many of these same changes sometimes seem to occur in less than 50 years. Given the speed of these transformations, it sometimes seems as though some deity has pushed the fast-forward button on social change. (For more recent research on the history of passionate love and sexual desire, see Anderson and Zinsser, 1999; Collins, 2003; Coontz, 2005; Gay, 1984, 1986, 1996, 1999; Hartog, 2001; Hodes, 1999; Robb, 2004; Yalom, 2001.)

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Culture can, of course, have a profound impact on how people view love, how susceptible they are to falling in love, with whom they tend to fall in love, and how their passionate affairs work out (see Chapter 5 in this volume).

Cross-cultural psychologists such as Harry Triandis and colleagues (Triandis, McCusker, and Hui, 1990) have observed that the world’s cultures differ profoundly in the extent to which they emphasize individualism or collectivism (although some would focus on related concepts: independence or interdependence; modernism or traditionalism; urbanism or ruralism; affluence or poverty). Individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada, and the countries of northern and western Europe) allow members to focus on personal goals. Collectivist cultures (e.g., China, many African and Latin American nations, Greece, southern Italy, and the Pacific Islands) insist that members subordinate personal interests to those of the group. Individualist cultures stress rights over duties; collectivists stress duties over rights.

Let us now review what cultural researchers have discovered about the impact of culture on passionate love and sexual desire.

The Meaning of Passionate Love

In a now classic study, Shaver, Wu, and Schwartz (1991) interviewed young people in America, Italy, and the People’s Republic of China about their emotional experiences. They found that Americans and Italians tended to equate love with happiness
and to assume that both passionate and companionate love were intensely positive experiences. Students in Beijing, China, possessed a darker view of love. In the Chinese language, there are few “happy-love” words; love is associated with sadness. Not surprisingly, then, in the 1990s, Chinese men and women tended to associate passionate love with such ideographs as infatuation, unrequited love, nostalgia, and sorrow love. (Shaver, Murdaya, and Fraley [2001] argued that China, too, may be “modernizing” in their view of love.)

Researchers agree that cultural values may have a subtle influence on the meanings people associate with the construct love (Kim and Hatfield, 2004; Kitayama, 2002; Luciano, 2003; Nisbett, 2003; Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, and Coon, 2002; Weaver and Ganong, 2004). There is, however, considerable debate as to the importance of such differences. When social psychologists explored folk conceptions of love in a variety of cultures—including the People’s Republic of China, Indonesia, Micronesia, Palau, and Turkey—they found that people possessed surprisingly similar views of love and other “feelings of the heart” (for a review of this research, see Fischer et al., 1998; Jankowiak, 1995; Kim and Hatfield, 2004; Shaver, Murdaya, and Fraley, 2001).

As we observed earlier, cultural theorists have predicted that cultural rules should exert a profound impact on how common passionate feelings are within a culture, how intensely passion is experienced, and how people attempt to deal with these tumultuous feelings. Alas, the sparse existing data provide only minimal support for this intriguing and plausible sounding hypothesis.

**Culture and Susceptibility to Love**

Sprecher and colleagues (1994) interviewed 1,667 men and women in the United States, Russia, and Japan. Based on notions of individualism versus collectivism, the authors predicted that American men and women should be most vulnerable to love and the Japanese the least likely to be “love besotted.” The authors were wrong. Passion turned out to be more common worldwide than they had expected. In fact, 59% of American college students, 67% of Russian students, and 53% of Japanese students said they were in love at the time of the interview. In all three cultures, men were slightly less likely than were women to be in love (Table 2.1).

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</table>
There was no evidence, however, that individualistic cultures breed young men and women who are more love-struck than do collectivist societies.

Similarly, surveys of Mexican American, Chinese American, and Euro-American students have found that in a variety of ethnic groups, young men and women show similarly high rates of “being in love” at the present time (Aron and Rodriguez, 1992; Doherty et al., 1994).

Intensity of Passionate Love

What impact does culture have on how passionately men and women feel about their beloved? Hatfield and Rapson (1987) asked young people of European, Filipino, and Japanese ancestry to complete the PLS. Men and women from the various ethnic groups seemed to love with equal passion. Doherty and colleagues (1994) confirmed these results in a study with European Americans, Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, and Pacific Islanders (Table 2.2).

The Willingness to Marry Someone You Do Not Love

In the West, since the 19th century, love has been considered to be the sine qua non of marriage (Kelley et al., 1983; Sprecher et al., 1994).

In the mid 1960s, William Kephart (1967) asked more than 1,000 college students, “If a boy (girl) had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry this person if you were not in love with him (her)?” He found that men and women had different ideas as to how important romantic love was in a marriage. Men thought passion was essential (only 35% of them said they would marry someone they did not love). Women were more practical. They said that the absence of love would not necessarily deter them from considering marriage (A full 76% of them said they would be willing to marry someone they did not love). Kephart suggested that while men might have the luxury of marrying for love, women did not. The status of women was dependent on that of their husbands. Thus, they had to be practical and take a potential husband’s family background, professional status, and income into account.

Since the 1960s, sociologists have continued to ask young American men and women this question. They have found that, year by year, young American men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLS Scores of Various Ethnic Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasians (in Hawaii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasians (mainland USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipinos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and women have come to demand more and more of love in the marital equation. In the most recent research, 86% of American men and 91% of American women answered the question with a resounding “No!” (Allgeier and Wiederman, 1991) Today, American men and women assume that romantic love is so important that they insist that if they fell out of love, they would not even consider staying married (Simpson, Campbell, and Berscheid, 1986). Some social commentators have suggested that with more experience these young romantics might find that they are willing to “settle” for less than they think they would, but as yet there is no evidence to indicate that this is so.

How do young men and women in other countries feel about this issue? Many cultural psychologists have pointed out that cultural values have a profound impact on how people feel about the wisdom of love matches as compared with arranged marriages.

Throughout the world, arranged marriages are still relatively common. It seems reasonable to argue that in societies such as China (Pimentel, 2000; Xu and Whyte, 1990), India (Sprecher and Chandak, 1992), and Japan (Sprecher et al., 1994) where arranged marriages are fairly typical, particularly in rural areas, they ought to be viewed more positively than in the West, where they are relatively rare.

To test this notion, Sprecher and colleagues (1994) asked American, Russian, and Japanese students, “If a person had all the other qualities you desired, would you marry him/her if you were not in love?” Students could answer only yes or no. The authors assumed that only Americans would demand love and marriage; they predicted that both the Russians and the Japanese would be more practical. They were wrong. Both the Americans and the Japanese were romantics. Few of them would consider marrying someone they did not love; only 11% of Americans and 18% of the Japanese said yes. The Russians were more practical; 37% of them said they would accept such a proposal. Russian men were only slightly more practical than were men in other countries. It was the Russian women who were most likely to settle.

Despite the larger proportion of Russian women willing to enter a loveless marriage, it remains true that a large majority of individuals in the three cultures would refuse to marry someone they do not love (Table 2.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would You Marry Someone You Did Not Love?</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American men</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American women</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian men</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian women</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese men</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese women</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly, in a landmark study, Levine and colleagues (1995) asked college students in 11 different nations if they would be willing to marry someone they did not love even if that person had all the other qualities they desired. Students could answer yes or no or admit that they were undecided. In affluent nations such as the United States, Brazil, Australia, Japan, and England young people were insistent on love as a prerequisite for marriage. Only in traditional, collectivist, third-world nations such as the Philippines, Thailand, India, and Pakistan were students willing to compromise and marry someone they did not love. In these societies, of course, the extended family is still extremely important and poverty widespread (Tables 2.4 and 2.5).

TABLE 2.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>85.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>83.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Answers are shown in percentages)

TABLE 2.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>32.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Answers are shown in percentages)
Research suggests that today, young men and women in many countries throughout the world consider love to be a prerequisite for courtship and marriage. It is primarily in Eastern, collectivist, and poorer regions—such as in Africa or Latin America, in China or Arab countries (i.e., Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Syria)—that passionate love remains a bit of a luxury. However, it may be that even there, the winds of globalization are blowing. Throughout the world, religious and parental power appears to be crumbling; the idealization of arranged marriages is being replaced by the ideal of love marriages.

**HOW LONG DOES PASSIONATE LOVE LAST?**

Passion soon burns itself out. Consider this exchange between anthropologist Shostak (1981, p. 268) and a !Kung (African) tribesman who were observing a young married couple running after each other:

As I stood watching, I noticed the young man sitting in the shade of a tree, also watching. I said, “They’re very much in love, aren’t they?” He answered, “Yes, they are.” After a pause, he added, “For now.” I asked him to explain, and he said, “When two people are first together, their hearts are on fire and their passion is very great. After a while, the fire cools and that’s how it stays.” … “They continue to love each other, but it’s in a different way—warm and dependable.” … How long did this take? “It varies among couples. A few months, usually; sometimes longer. But it always happens.” Was it also true for a lover? “No,” he explained, “feelings for a lover stay intense much longer, sometimes for years.”

Fisher (2004) argued that the transient nature of passionate love is a cultural universal. She contended that our Homo sapien ancestors experienced passionate love and sexual desire for very practical genetic reasons. They were primed to fall ardently, sexually in love for about four years. This is precisely the amount of time it takes to conceive a child and take care of it until it is old enough to survive on its own. (In tribal societies, children are relatively self-sufficient by this age. By that time, they generally prefer to spend most of their time playing with other children.) Once our ancestors no longer had a practical reason to remain together, they had every evolutionary reason to fall out of love with their previous partner and to fall in love with someone new. Why were people programmed to engage in such serial pair bonding? Fisher maintained that such serial monogamy produces maximum genetic diversity, which is an evolutionary advantage.

Other scholars agree. Regan (2007) observed, “Being in love, having a crush on someone is wonderful … but our bodies can’t be in that state all the time…. Your body would fizzle out. As a species, we’d die.”

There is indeed evidence that passionate love does erode with time. Traupmann and Hatfield (1981), for example, interviewed a truly random sample of 953 dating couples, newlyweds, and older women (who had been married an average of 33 years) in Madison, Wisconsin. (The longest marriage was 59 years.) The authors assumed that although passionate love would decline precipitously
Over time, passionate love did plummet. Couples started out loving their partners intensely. Both steady daters and newlyweds expressed “a great deal of passionate love” for their mates. But after many years of marriage, women reported that they and their husbands now felt only “some” passionate love for one another (Figure 2.1).

And what of the fate of companionate love? Theorists generally paint a rosy picture of such love. Robert Sternberg (cited in Goleman, 1985) for example, proposed, “Passion is the quickest to develop, and the quickest to fade.” Alas, the authors found that over time, both passionate and companionate love tended to decline at approximately the same rate (Figure 2.2).

This finding was especially unsettling since the authors were only interviewing couples whose marriages had survived for 10, 20, or 50 years. Couples whose relationships were most dismal may well have divorced and thus been lost from the samples.

**SPECULATIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE**

Yale historian Robin Winks (1968) said that writing history is “like nailing jelly to the wall.” Trying to describe sweeping historical trends and then attempting to
predict future trends is even more difficult. But despite the fact that history does not always move in a linear direction, let us make an effort.

First, recent evidence suggests that men and women in the West appear to be moving slowly and bumpily toward gender and social equality in their sexual preferences, feelings, and experiences. Most modern societies are also moving in the direction of allowing greater sexual freedom for all individuals (although this can be slowed by events, such as the AIDS epidemic). The global village created by worldwide communication, computers and satellites, information exchange, travel, and trade makes it hard to imagine that non-Western cultures can long hold off the deeper advancing currents of individualism or that they can forever restrain the spirit of sexual equality and experimentation. Of course, that revolution is far from being consummated—and healthy, honorable disagreement about the revolution remains ongoing.

We would predict that people throughout the world will come increasingly to accept a transforming trio of powerful ideas. First, there is a belief in the equality of women and members of minority groups. Second, there is a belief that the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain are desirable goals in life. (This may seem obvious, but it is a truly revolutionary change.) Finally, there is an inexorable tendency toward the belief that change and improvement in life are attainable and that actions aimed at the realization of those ends may be preferable to resignation.
and the passive acceptance of age-old traditions. The idea of “progress” may be an invention of the 18th century European *philosophes*, but that “new” notion seems to be slowly gaining currency throughout our planet.

REFERENCES


PaSSionatE lovE and SExual dESirE


The Evolution of Love and Long-Term Bonds

GIAN C. GONZAGA AND MARTIE G. HASELTON

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The heart has its reasons, that reason knows not of. 

Blaise Pascal

INTRODUCTION

Humans show incredible diversity in their social systems across cultures and even more variation at the individual level—documenting these differences is enough to keep many relationship scientists busy for their entire careers. In the face of this variation, there are also relationship universals, many of which can be understood as adaptations for solving many of the relationship challenges faced by our intensely social species. In this chapter, we will argue for one such universal: romantic love. We make two central claims. First, following Pillsworth and Haselton (2006), we provide evidence that there has been strong selection for the formation of long-term bonds designed to facilitate biparental care. Second, we argue that the experience of romantic love likely evolved to assist in the formation and maintenance of long-term bonds. We review evidence, including the phenomenology, signaling properties, cognitive effects, and physiological underpinnings of love, that appears to support the hypothesis that love is a “commitment device.”

THE EVOLUTION OF LONG-TERM BONDS

Parental Investment Theory

Any course in evolutionary psychology will begin with grand overarching theories, including Trivers’s (1972) theory of parental investment. The theory elegantly predicts that the sex obligated to invest more in offspring, most often the female, will be more selective than men in choosing mates. In turn, the lower-investing sex, usually male, will vigorously compete with rivals for access to the valuable high-investing sex and will be more open to low-cost mating opportunities than the other sex. When students learn this theory, they often think that it follows that women are “long-term” in their mating orientation and men are not. However, the theory also predicts that members of each sex will invest heavily in offspring if joint parental care increases the chances that offspring will survive to reproductive maturity—and for humans there is much evidence that this was the case over the course of evolutionary history, as well as in the modern world.

The Burden of Raising Human Offspring

Human offspring require huge investments of time and energy. During a woman’s nine-month pregnancy, she needs to increase her caloric intake by 8% to 10% (Dufour and Sauther, 2002). Lactation, which among modern hunter gatherers lasts for two and a half years or longer (Lancaster et al., 2000), requires an even greater caloric increase of 28% (Dufour and Sauther, 2002). Human offspring,
relative to the offspring of other primates, also have an extended juvenile period. Unlike infant chimpanzees who are able from birth to cling to their mothers and are self-sufficient by age 5, human children in hunter-gatherer societies do not produce as many calories as they consume until the age of 15 (For a review, see Pillsworth and Haselton, 2006). Since the average interbirth interval is much shorter than 15 years (e.g., Mace, 1999), mothers will often care for multiple dependents at the same time (Pillsworth and Haselton, 2006).

Fathers Benefit from Investing in Their Own Offspring

Siblings and parents may assist a woman in caring for her offspring, but it was likely that no other caretaker has as much genetic interest in the offspring as the biological father. Like the mother, a biological father shares 50% of his genes with offspring, whereas grandparents, aunts, and uncles share only 25% or less (Jeon and Buss, 2007). Given the needs of human offspring and the father's genetic interest in offspring, it is likely that ancestral men increased their fitness by investing heavily in their own offspring.

Among modern humans, there is good evidence of fathers' investment. In the Ache, an indigenous hunting population in eastern Paraguay, children whose fathers are present for the first five years of their lives are more than twice as likely to survive than children whose fathers had died and nearly three times as likely to survive than children whose fathers divorced or deserted their mothers (Hurtado and Hill, 1992). In a meta-analysis of the 186 largely preindustrial societies, Marlowe (2000) found evidence of wide variation in fathers' investment, but even at its lowest levels, investment in children was always significantly above zero. Thus, fathers' investment appears to matter, and fathers do invest in children.

Extended Sexual Cohabitation and Pregnancy Risk

Emerging evidence indicates that longer sexual relationships may increase the chances of successful pregnancies. Offspring are only 50% genetically related to their mothers, leading to possible immune system attack of the developing fetus. A hypothesized consequence of this is preeclampsia, a severe form of gestational hypertension that occurs in about 10% of human pregnancies. The risk of preeclampsia is lower for later pregnancies and thus was thought by the medical community to be a “disease of first pregnancies.” Recent studies have shown, however, that the risk level is the same for a woman's subsequent pregnancy if the pregnancy is with a new father (Dekker and Robillard, 2003; Robillard, Dekker, and Hulsey, 1999). Additional evidence shows that for all pregnancies with new fathers, the length of sexual cohabitation predicts preeclampsia risk: It is significantly higher for conceptions occurring within the first four months of sexual cohabitation than after one year (Robillard et al., 1994). Longer periods of sexual cohabitation are also characterized by higher birth weights (ibid.). The reasons for this pattern are not fully understood, but one possibility is that the mother's immune system “learns” over time not to reject the genetic material of her partner. In sum, patterns of preeclampsia risk hint at another selection pressure favoring the evolution of long-term bonds.
The Universality of Coupling and Long-Term Bonds

Social scientists often claim that it is difficult to characterize the mating system of humans because the range of mating practices vary widely across cultures, with some permitting polygyny, some polyandry, some monogamy, or a combination of these. However, Pillsworth and Haselton (2005, 2006) argued that coupling—a special partnership between two individuals—may be nearly universal. In most cultures studied, there are social norms governing marriage, marriage vows are typically between two individuals at a time, and marriage involves an implicit or explicit expectation of joint parental care (Brown, 1991; Murdock, 1949, 1967). Polygyny is permitted in 82% of the world’s cultures (Murdock, 1967), but most men in these cultures do not marry multiple wives and instead form socially monogamous unions (Borgerhoff-Mulder and Caro, 1983; Kuper, 1982; Murdock, 1949, 1967). Even in polygynous marriages, husbands often feel particularly bonded to one of their wives, and cowives jealously compete for husbands’ affections (Jankowiak and Allen, 1995).

The Commitment Problem

The previous sections summarized several lines of work indicating the adaptive advantages of long-term committed romantic bonds: These bonds facilitate biparental care and increase the chances of offspring survival; they may facilitate better pregnancy outcomes; and they are likely to be universal, even when cultures permit other forms of marriage.

Although the advantages of long-term bonds seem clear, long-term mates, like those in most long-term alliances, face a dilemma. Both members of the couple must remain loyal for each to gain the long-term fitness advantages of the partnership. At the same time, it is also in each partner’s interest to find the best possible partner and, if a more attractive alternative comes along, to abandon a partner in an established relationship. This conflict of motives produces the commitment problem (Frank, 1988, 2001; Hirshleifer, 1987): The benefits of an alliance are gained through mutual commitments, but mutual commitments require the foreclosure of other attractive options.

Commitment to a single individual is complicated by a number of known psychological tendencies. For example, people tend to overvalue immediate benefits relative to long-term gains: Benefits to be gained in the future feel subjectively less attractive than those we can obtain right now (Fredrick, Loewenstein, and O’Donoghue, 2003). This explains why diets, health resolutions, savings plans, and other attempted long-term commitments often fail. In romantic relationships, the rewards of long-term bonds become less attractive in the face of the temptation of desirable alternative mates. Moreover, over time existing romantic relationships are likely to become less satisfying (Karney and Bradbury, 1995); thus, the longer relationships continue the more likely individuals are to seek relationships with attractive alternatives.
How then do romantic partners avoid the temptations of attractive alternatives? One possibility is that there is an experience powerful enough to overcome the temptation to stray from the relationship and that organizes behavior in such a way as to solidify and defend commitment to an existing partner. We propose that the experience of love fulfills this function. By this account, love acts as a commitment device (e.g., Frank, 1988; Sternberg, 1986), motivating individuals to remain committed to the relationship, signaling this intention between romantic partners, and helping individuals avoid the temptation of attractive alternatives.

**Love as a Commitment Device**

Frank (1988, 2001) and Hirshliefer (1987) characterized emotions as commitment devices that help people to defy immediate, seemingly rational self-interests. People in love often believe, for example, that they have found their one and only soul mate among thousands, millions, even billions of possibilities. The powerful motivation of the experience of love helps them genuinely foreclose other options by acting as an immediate reward or punishment. This facilitates commitment in spite of the fact that many of the benefits of the relationship are unlikely to occur for many years.

Emotions also cause people to behave in highly costly ways. These costly behaviors serve as honest signals of commitment that assure the partner of the individual’s intention to commit. Those in love often make extravagant displays of loyalty, such as sacrificing one’s own career, publicly committing to marriage, or even risking one’s life (Aron and Aron, 1997). These signals are hard to fake and are therefore believable—only true love would motivate a person to incur those costs. Moreover, feelings of love play a critical role in maintaining social bonds day to day. Across time, love between partners is associated with intimacy, connection, formation of long-term plans, and a desire to be physically close (Aron and Aron, 1998; Diamond, 2003; Dion and Dion, 1973; Ellis and Malamuth, 2000; Hatfield and Rapson, 1993; Hendrick and Hendrick, 1992; Sternberg, 1986), and partners who feel more love for each other are more likely to remain together (Sprecher, 1999).

Social-functional accounts of emotion further the claim that love acts as a commitment device (Gonzaga et al., 2001, 2006). The experience of emotion coordinates a number of loosely related psychological, physiological, and behavioral systems to help individuals maintain relationships during ongoing social interactions (Keltner and Haidt, 1999). Emotions, according to this account, help individuals negotiate the moment-to-moment interactions that lie at the core of social relationships (e.g., resolving conflict, providing social support).

**Romantic Love as a Human Universal**

Cross-cultural evidence supports the hypothesis that love is a universal adaptation that may serve an important relationship function. Jankowiak and Fischer (1998) examined ethnographies from the standard cross-cultural sample of 166 different cultures. In 147 of the 166 ethnographic accounts they found evidence of the
existence of romantic love. In the remaining 19 cultures, there was no evidence presented that romantic love did not exist; rather, the ethnographies merely lacked pertinent data.

In an ambitious doctoral dissertation, Harris (1995) examined ethnographic evidence in 100 cultures representing all general regions of the world, including historical evidence from peoples with disparate literary traditions. She operationalized love using key definitions of romantic love from the relationships literature (e.g., Averill, 1985; Hatfield and Walster, 1978; Lee, 1988; Murstein, 1970; Peele, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, and Bradshaw, 1988; Sternberg, 1986; Tennov, 1999), including requiring features like the “desire for union or merger, both sexual and emotional” and the “exclusivity of the emotion for one particular person.” Based on these theoretically derived criteria, Harris found evidence of love in every culture included in the study. Moreover, in their review of historical evidence, Hatfield and Rapson (Chapter 2 in this volume) find evidence of romantic love dating to the earliest known writings of the Sumerians. In sum, like socially monogamous unions, the experience of romantic love appears to be universal and stretches back through the known history of humans.

For the remainder of this chapter we turn to the literature that addresses the hypothesis that apparently universal feelings of love act as a commitment device helping partners to (1) select a mate from a sea of potential alternatives and (2) to maintain long-term bonds. We review evidence on the biological underpinnings of love, the phenomenological signature of love, the behavioral signal of love, and how love addresses one of the most serious threats to a romantic relationship, the temptation of attractive alternatives.

SELECTING “THE ONE”

In the search for a mate, individuals face the challenge of choice: given the possibility of indefinite search (Todd and Miller, 1999), what leads people to stop and select “The One” on whom they will focus their efforts to establish a long-term bond? Several lines of evidence indicate that the function of passionate love felt in the early stages of relationships does just this.

The Phenomenology of Passionate Love

The feeling component of emotion plays two important roles. First, it signals important states of affairs to the individual. In turn, the feeling also motivates the appropriate behavior necessary to address the situation (Buck, 1999; Frijda, 1988; Schwarz and Clore, 1996).

Surveys of individuals experiencing love early in relationships point to the powerful motivational qualities of this experience. Tennov (1999) reported on the experience of limerence or the obsessional love that individuals often experience early in relationships. Among the qualities of limerence she found were the following: intrusive thinking about the partner, acute longing for reciprocation, an
inability to experience limerence for more than one person at the same time, a fear of rejection by the partner, intensification of the feelings in the face of adversity, and a high intensity of feelings such that other concerns were left behind. Each of these qualities shows how, in the early stages of a relationship, strong feelings of love facilitate a single-minded choice of one partner over others. In addition, this experience makes an individual acutely sensitive to signals from the partner about whether the relationship is likely to succeed.

As relationships start to develop, love relates to other experiences that promote relationship growth, including feelings of connectedness and closeness (Sternberg, 1986), affection (Hatfield, 1988; Hatfield and Rapson, 1993; Hatfield and Walster, 1978), empathy and admiration (Rempel and Burris, 2005), a desire to be near an intimate (Aron and Aron, 1991; Hatfield, 1988; Hatfield and Walster, 1978), and positive emotional states that promote approach and intimacy such as desire, sympathy, amusement, and happiness (Gonzaga et al., 2001, 2006).

**The Biology of Passionate Love**

In a recent study, individuals reporting being passionately in love were induced to feel love for their partner while being scanned in a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine. The researchers found activation in reward areas of the brain, including the right ventral tegmental area, the right postero-dorsal body, and the medial caudate nucleus (Aron et al., 2005). Using a similar methodology Bartels and Zeki (2000) showed that the experience of passionate love activated areas related to emotions, euphoria, and the experience of having “gut feelings,” the medial insula, anterior cingulated cortex, caudate nucleus, and the putamen. These areas are also activated by psychostimulants, like cocaine.

The experience of love early in relationships may recruit a constellation of neurotransmitters and hormones that lead to obsessive thoughts and behaviors and sensitize the stress response system. One study found that the density of platelet serotonin 5-HT transporters in individuals in the early stages of romantic love was equivalent to that of patients with obsessive compulsive disorder and that both groups were lower than a control group (Marazziti et al., 1999). In another study, participants in the early stages of love had higher levels of cortisol, suggesting higher levels of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) activation or stress response (Marazziti and Canale, 2004). Other researchers have suggested that individuals seek to affiliate in times of stress in an attempt to reduce the negative effects of the stress response (Taylor et al., 2000, 2005). Moreover, the reward areas of the brain elicited by love are all linked to the release of dopamine, suggesting that the experience of love can make interaction with the partner highly pleasurable.

In sum, the phenomenological qualities and biological correlates of love in the early stages of a relationship suggest that love leads to the choice of “The One” and may motivate actions to initiate and strengthen that relationship. The next section of the chapter turns from relationship initiation to relationship maintenance.
STAYING TOGETHER

The Nonverbal Display of Love

Once a relationship is established, there are new challenges. First, one must assure a partner that one’s feelings are genuine and that commitment to the relationship will continue. Second, one must also be sure that the same holds true for one’s partner. A nonverbal signal of love would communicate the internal state of the sender and information about the social environment between partners, evoke similar displays of love, and elicit prorelationship behavior (Keltner and Kring, 1998).

Is there evidence for a distinct nonverbal display of love? Based on animal, ethological, and laboratory studies (e.g., Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1974, 1989; Moore, 1985) Gonzaga and colleagues (2001, 2006) proposed a set of four affiliation cues that were likely behavioral markers of love: head nods, Duchenne smiles, positive gesticulation, and leaning toward the partner. In a series of studies on romantic partners they found that these cues reliably signaled the experience of love during positive interpersonal interactions such as the couple discussing their first date. Most importantly, the display of affiliation cues was unrelated to other closely related emotional states such as happiness, desire, and arousal. At least in this context affiliation cues signaled love—and only love—between romantic partners.

Love and Commitment-Related Behaviors

Brief social interactions, such as the ones previously outlined, often serve as the building blocks for intimate relationships (e.g., Cohan and Bradbury, 1997; Gottman and Levenson, 1986; Gottman et al., 1998). In this vein some studies have linked the experience of love felt during social interactions with relationship relevant behaviors. Specifically, couples who experienced more love during positive interactions were more likely to solve conflicts in constructive rather than contentious ways, have playful rather than hostile teasing, take each other into account when planning life goals, participate in more activities together, provide better social support, discuss marriage, and most importantly report higher levels of commitment (Gonzaga et al., 2001, 2006).

Love and the Biology of Commitment

Finally, there is emerging evidence that the experience of love may relate to the biological markers of long-term social monogamy. Specifically, love may relate to the release of oxytocin, a mammalian hormone, consisting of nine amino acids. It is released both in the central nervous system (CNS) and in the bloodstream and may promote bonding behavior by reducing anxiety (Carter and Altemus, 1997; Taylor et al., 2000; Uvnas-Moberg, 1998) or making social contact and affiliation pleasant (Insel, Young, and Zuoxin, 1997; Panksepp, 1998). Some claim that oxytocin is one biological substrate of love (Carter, 1998; Insel, 1993).

In one study, women who were in romantic relationships had greater increases in oxytocin while recalling a love event than those not in a relationship (Turner...
et al., 1999). Other studies have shown that oxytocin is released in humans during sexual activity (Carmichael et al., 1987; Murphy et al., 1987) and close body contact (Light, Grewen, and Amico, 2005). Finally, oxytocin reactivity is related to the nonverbal display of love (Gonzaga et al., 2006). Some theorists posit that this oxytocin release promotes bonding between individuals who have engaged in sexual activity (Carter, 1998; Hazan and Zeifman, 1999), which holds up the notion that pair bonding supports joint parental care of offspring that result from such unions.

As relationships become established, love seems to aid individuals in maintaining the relationship by communicating the intention to commit between partners, organizing and motivating broad classes of behavior that further signal the intention to commit, and possibly eliciting the physiological underpinnings of long-term commitment. The final part of the chapter turns to one of the primary threats to relationship success: the temptation of attractive alternatives. This challenge presents a profound threat to the relationship and offers a most stringent test of the hypothesis that love acts as a commitment device.

**Avoiding Attractive Alternatives**

The psychological definition of commitment and the definition used by game theorists like Frank (1988) and Hirshleifer (1987) differ. Psychologists often define commitment as partners’ intentions to stay in relationships, pledges of loyalty or devotion, or feelings of connectedness. For example, Wieselquist and colleagues (1999 p. 953) defined commitment as “a long-term orientation toward a relationship, including intent to persist and feelings of psychological attachment.” Game theoretic commitment, in contrast, is a commitment in which options have been removed; one is forced continue on the path to which he or she has “committed” and cannot retreat across bridges that have been burned. To date, relatively little work has investigated the connection between love and game theoretic commitment—that is, the foreclosure of alternatives.

Alternatives are at the core of commitment problem (Hirshleifer, 1987). To gain the benefits of a long-term relationship, individuals in romantic relationships resist the temptation of alternatives that may be more attractive in the moment but that endanger the long-term prospects of the relationship. How then do individuals resist this temptation?

A number of researchers have addressed this topic and have shown that individuals in relationships have psychological mechanisms that reduce the temptation of attractive alternatives. One well-studied mechanism is the tendency for individuals in committed relationships to have reduced ratings of the attractiveness of alternative—better known as derogating attractive alternatives. Johnson and Rusbult (1989) showed that individuals who were in committed relationships or were manipulated to feel more commitment were more likely to derogate alternatives. Simpson, Gangestad, and Lerma (1990) showed that heterosexual individuals in relationships only derogate opposite-sex or young alternatives. Moreover, as individuals become more committed they are more likely to derogate
highly threatening alternatives (Lydon, Fitzsimons, and Naidoo, 2003; Lydon et al., 1999) and also upwardly bias their opinions of their own partner (Fletcher and Boyes, this volume). In a different line of work Miller (1997) showed that individuals who spend less time attending to photos of attractive alternatives were less likely to break up with their current romantic partner. Attention to alternatives, not surprisingly, is negatively related to satisfaction and commitment to an existing relationship (for a review of this evidence see Miller, 2003; also Chapter 19 in this volume). When individuals are in satisfying romantic relationships they are less likely to notice the existence of attractive alternatives.

While this work has been productive it has not directly tested the effect of love on how individuals process thoughts of attractive alternatives. In a recent study Gonzaga et al. (in press) did just this. We showed that when individuals are faced with intrusive thoughts of an attractive alternative they are most likely to suppress the thought of the alternative. While at first this may seem a reasonable course of action, research on thought suppression shows that this strategy is ultimately likely to lead to a rebound of thoughts of the attractive alternative, such that they are more frequent than if one had not suppressed the thought (Wegner et al., 1987). In a second study, we found that individuals who were induced to feel love for their partner were able to successfully suppress thoughts of attractive alternatives, whereas those who were induced to feel sexual desire for their romantic partner or those in a control condition were not. Thus, the experience of love appears to organize psychological resources to directly counter the threat posed by attractive alternatives.

Across the duration of a relationship love has influence over many of the proximal processes that support finding and keeping a monogamous pair-bonding relationship. As the relationship starts, love provides a powerful motivation to seek and start a relationship with a single individual; it helps you find “The One.” As that relationship develops, love organizes disparate systems to meet the challenges, both big and small, that may threaten the long-term success of that bond; it helps you keep “The One.”

CONCLUSION

Voltaire once wrote, “Love is a canvas furnished by Nature and embroidered by imagination.” His quote gives keen insight into human relationships, the evolutionary roots, and day-to-day manifestations of love. Like Voltaire we have argued that humans have likely evolved to form and maintain socially monogamous pair bonds to benefit offspring, that relationships have myriad challenges to their long-term success, and that the experience of love helps to address these challenges. Indeed, love appears to organize motives, physiology, cognition, and behavior in ways that lead us to select and single-mindedly pursue a partner and then to maintain the bond for several years, decades, or an entire lifetime. Research on love, including what is reviewed in this chapter, continues to reveal the fundamental importance of love and our closest relationships.
REFERENCES


relationship behavior, and trust in close relationships. *Journal of Personality and

**ENDNOTES**

1. The Duchenne smile recruits both the zygomatic major muscle, which turns the lips
upward into a smile, and the orbicularis oculi, which creates crow’s feet at the corners
of the eyes. These types of smiles are linked to a positive emotional state, unlike those
that do not recruit the orbicularis oculi (Ekman, Davidson, and Friesen, 1990).
Augmenting the Sense of Security in Romantic, Leader–Follower, Therapeutic, and Group Relationships

A Relational Model of Psychological Change

PHILLIP R. SHAVER AND MARIO MIKULINCER

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INTRODUCTION

Attachment theory deals with the effects of experiences in close relationships on the development of both favorable and (in the case of nonoptimal relationships) unfavorable personality characteristics. In his exposition of attachment theory, John Bowlby (1973, 1980, 1982, 1988) explained why the availability of caring, supportive
relationship partners, beginning in infancy, is so important to developing a sense of attachment security (confidence that one is competent and lovable and that caregivers will be available and supportive when needed), which in turn fosters the development of stable self-esteem, constructive coping strategies, maintenance of emotional stability, and formation of mutually satisfying relationships throughout life. In our research, we have consistently found that a dispositional sense of security as well as experimentally augmented security (based on priming mental representations of security) contributes to a “broaden-and-build” (Fredrickson, 2001) cycle of attachment security that has beneficial effects on mental health, social judgments, and interpersonal behaviors (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003, 2005, 2007; Shaver and Mikulincer, 2002, 2006).

In other chapters of the present volume, there is much additional evidence for the broadening and building effects of attachment security. For example, links are established between attachment security and self-esteem (Chapter 5), a more prosocial focus of attention during social interactions (Chapter 8), relationship commitment (Chapter 9), less competitive relationships with siblings (Chapter 14), restraint of aggression during couple conflicts (Chapter 16), less antisocial reactions to ostracism (Chapter 18), and less distraction from attractive alternative relationship partners (Chapter 19).

This chapter moves beyond the well-researched correlates of attachment security to propose a broader relational model of psychological change. According to this model, repeated and influential interactions with security-enhancing relationship partners, and not only romantic partners, beneficially alter a person’s mental representations of self and others, attachment patterns, and psychological functioning. We review prospective longitudinal findings from our laboratories showing that being involved in a relationship with a sensitive, responsive, and supportive romantic partner, military officer, manager, residential staff member, team coworker, or therapist creates long-term beneficial changes in attachment-related cognitions and feelings as well as broader psychological functioning. The findings provide strong support for Bowlby’s ideas about the plasticity of the attachment system across the life span and the growth-enhancing consequences of secure attachments (see also Chapter 11 in this volume).

ATTACHMENT THEORY: BASIC CONCEPTS

Attachment theory is based on the fundamental idea that human beings are born with an innate psychobiological system (the attachment behavioral system) that motivates them to seek proximity to protective others (attachment figures) in times of need (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). According to Bowlby (1982), these attachment figures (whom he called “stronger and wiser” caregivers) provide a “safe haven” in times of need (i.e., they reliably provide protection, comfort, and relief) and a “secure base” (i.e., the support that allows a child or adult relationship partner to pursue non-attachment goals, with confidence, in a relatively safe and encouraging environment). This protection and support from attachment figures creates an inner sense of attachment security, which normally terminates proximity-seeking
behavior and allows a person to function better in a wide array of life domains such as exploration, learning, interpersonal behavior, and sexual mating.

During infancy, primary caregivers (e.g., parents) are likely to serve as attachment figures. In later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, a wider variety of relationship partners can serve as attachment figures, including not just parents but other relatives, familiar coworkers, teachers and coaches, close friends, and romantic partners (see Chapter 11 in this volume). There may also be context-specific attachment figures—real or potential sources of comfort and support in specific milieus, such as organizational leaders and psychotherapists or counselors. Moreover, groups, institutions, and symbolic personages (e.g., God) can become safe havens and secure bases. (See Chapter 10 in this volume for an analysis of connections and differences between the dyadic-relational and collective levels of social behavior.) In addition, adults can obtain comfort and protection by calling upon mental representations of relationship partners who regularly provide a secure base (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2004).

In addition to conceptualizing the normative aspects of attachment-system functioning, Bowlby (1973; see also Ainsworth et al., 1978) identified major individual differences in attachment security and various forms of insecurity, which arise in response to the behaviors of particular attachment figures. Interactions with attachment figures who are available and responsive in times of need promote a sense of attachment security and lead to the formation of positive working models (mental representations of the self and others). When attachment figures are not supportive, however, negative working models are formed and attachment insecurities become salient and persistent. In extensions of the theory to adolescents and adults, researchers have conceptualized these attachment insecurities in terms of two major dimensions: attachment anxiety and avoidance (e.g., Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998). The first dimension, anxiety, reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need; the second dimension, avoidance, reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship partners’ goodwill and strives to maintain emotional distance from partners. People who score low on both dimensions are said to be secure or securely attached. An adult’s location on these insecurity dimensions can be assessed with either self-report questionnaires or coded clinical interviews (Crowell, Fraley, and Shaver, 1999).

THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD CYCLE OF ATTACHMENT SECURITY

Based on an extensive review of adult attachment studies, Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) summarized the adult attachment literature in terms of a three-component model of attachment-system activation and dynamics. The first component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of threatening events and is responsible for activation of the attachment system. The second component involves the monitoring and appraisal of the availability and responsiveness of attachment figures and is responsible for the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. The third
component concerns the monitoring and appraisal of the viability of interpersonal proximity seeking as a means of coping with attachment insecurity and is responsible for variations in attachment anxiety or avoidance.

Here, we focus on the second component of this model—the effects of attachment-figure availability on the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. This cycle is a cascade of mental and behavioral events that enhances emotional stability, personal and social adjustment, satisfying close relationships, and autonomous personal growth. According to attachment theory, interactions with available and supportive attachment figures, by imparting a pervasive sense of safety, assuage distress and evoke positive emotions (e.g., Mikulincer and Florian, 2001). Experiences of attachment-figure availability also contribute to a reservoir of cognitive representations and emotional memories related to successful distress management, one’s own value and competence, and other people’s beneficence. Interactions with supportive attachment figures sustain a background sense of hope and optimism, heighten a secure person’s confidence in relationship partners’ goodwill, and strengthen one’s sense of self-worth—thanks to being valued, loved, and viewed as special by caring attachment figures.

The broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security is renewed each time a person notices that an actual or imaginary caring and loving attachment figure is available in times of stress. In our experimental studies, for example, we have consistently found that priming thoughts of an available and supportive attachment figure has positive effects on mood, mental health, compassionate and pro-social feelings and behaviors, and tolerance toward outgroup members, and this happens even in the case of otherwise insecure or insecurely attached people (e.g., Mikulincer and Shaver, 2001; Mikulincer, Shaver, and Horesh, 2006; Mikulincer et al., 2001, 2005). Similar positive effects of the priming of security-related mental representations have been found in self-concept, appraisals of romantic partners, and openness to new information regardless of dispositional attachment style (e.g., Baccus, Baldwin, and Packer, 2004; Green and Campbell, 2000; Rowe and Carnelley, 2003, 2006). These findings encourage us to believe that even the preconscious activation of mental representations of attachment-figure availability can, at least temporarily, instill a sense of security even in an otherwise attachment-insecure mind.

Based on these laboratory findings, we suspect that the positive effects of attachment-figure availability might be even stronger, more pervasive, and more resistant to change within relational contexts in which an actual relationship partner’s supportive behaviors are clear-cut, personally significant, and repeated over time and situations. Such behavior on the part of a relationship partner, therapist, or leader may counteract insecure people’s dispositional tendencies to doubt the availability and responsiveness of their social interaction partners and therefore set in motion a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. In other words, a relationship partner who acts as a reliable secure base can help an insecure person function more securely, both temporarily and chronically. Subsequent sections of this chapter review evidence showing that the actual presence of a supportive relationship partner in different kinds of relationships (i.e., romantic, leader–follower, group, and therapeutic) can have long-term positive effects on
a person’s attachment security and more general psychological well-being and mental health.

THE BROADEN-AND-BUILD CYCLE OF ATTACHMENT SECURITY IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

In adulthood, romantic relationships and marriages are the sites of some of the most important emotional bonds (see Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume). In fact, adopting a life-span perspective, attachment researchers (e.g., Fraley and Davis, 1997; Hazan and Zeifman, 1994) have consistently found that romantic partners are often an adult’s primary attachment figures. Therefore, one can expect that the availability of such a partner in times of need and his or her sensitivity and responsiveness to bids for proximity, protection, and security will have enduring effects on a person’s attachment organization and ability to sustain a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security.

Research supports this prediction. For example, the mere physical availability of a romantic partner has soothing, distress-alleviating effects. Coan, Schaefer, and Davidson (2006) scanned the brains (in a functional magnetic resonance imaging [fMRI] scanner) of married women who were undergoing a laboratory stress-induction (threat of electric shock) while either holding their husband’s hand, holding the hand of an otherwise unfamiliar male experimenter, or holding no hand at all. Coan et al. found that spousal handholding reduced physiological stress responses in the brain (e.g., in the right anterior insula, superior frontal gyrus, and hypothalamus). There is also evidence that a supportive romantic partner or spouse contributes notably to a person’s successful coping with stressful events and decreases the probability of developing emotional problems (for reviews and meta-analyses see Cohen, Gottlieb, and Underwood, 2000; Finch et al., 1999; Schwarzer and Leppin, 1989).

Besides mitigating distress, interactions with available, caring, and loving romantic partners or spouses facilitate prorelational behaviors that enhance relationship quality and satisfaction. This kind of positive relational process begins with appraising a partner’s sensitivity and responsiveness and continues in the form of stable positive beliefs and expectations about this person’s good qualities and intentions. These beliefs allow partners to become more deeply involved in their relationship.

The process fits with Reis and Shaver’s (1988) intimacy model, which portrays intimacy as a dynamic process that begins when one person reveals personally significant aspects of himself or herself to a partner. Subsequent steps in the process are then shaped by the partner’s responses. A sensitive, accepting, and supportive response facilitates the expression of deeper personal needs and concerns, which gradually leads to the development of a stable intimate relationship. In contrast, a disinterested, disapproving, or rejecting response discourages and interferes with intimacy and interferes with relationship development. Reis and Shaver (1988) contended that sensitive, accepting responses engender three kinds of feelings that
encourage more intimate interactions: a feeling of being understood (i.e., feeling that the partner understands one’s needs and feelings), a feeling of being validated (i.e., feeling that one is appreciated and respected by the partner), and a feeling of care (i.e., sensing that the partner is responsive to one’s needs). These three kinds of feelings are important components of the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security and allow a person to develop more secure emotional bonds. The Reis-Shaver model has been extensively supported by research (for a review see Reis, 2006).

So far, however, research has not provided detailed information about the extent to which positive interactions in adulthood lead to long-term changes in attachment organization or move a person toward a more secure attachment orientation. Fortunately, Lavi (2007) recently conducted a prospective eight-month study of young couples who had been dating for no more than three to four months. The main question was whether one partner’s sensitivity and supportiveness, as assessed at the beginning of the study, were capable of reducing the other partner’s insecurities within the relationship four and eight months later.

At the beginning of the study, Lavi (2007) randomly selected one partner in each of 100 couples to serve as the study “participant” and the other member as the “attachment figure.” From the participants Lavi (2007) collected self-reports of relationship satisfaction, global attachment anxiety and avoidance in relationships generally, and attachment insecurities within the specific relationship under study. With respect to the other couple member (the attachment figure), Lavi (2007) collected information about his or her sensitivity and supportiveness. Measures of sensitivity included (1) self-reports of dispositional empathy, (2) accuracy in decoding emotional facial expressions, and (3) accuracy in decoding negative and positive emotions that participants displayed in a nonverbal communication task. Measures of supportiveness included (1) self-reports of support provision within the current relationship and (2) actual supportive behaviors, coded by independent judges, during a videotaped dyadic interaction in which participants disclosed a personal problem. Four and eight months later, participants who were still dating the same romantic partner (73%) once again completed self-report measures of relationship satisfaction and global and within-relationship attachment security.

The findings revealed long-term positive effects of partner sensitivity and supportiveness. First, participants’ reports of within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance gradually decreased over the eight-month period, implying that maintenance of a dating relationship contributed to a decrease in relationship-specific attachment insecurities. However, these positive changes depended greatly on the attachment figure’s sensitivity and supportiveness, as assessed by behavioral measures (but not self-reports) at the beginning of the study. Partners who were more accurate in decoding facial expressions and nonverbal expressions of negative emotions and were coded by judges as more supportive toward participants in a dyadic interaction task brought about a steeper decline in within-relationship attachment anxiety and avoidance across the eight-month period. In fact, participants showed no significant decrease in within-relationship attachment insecurities if their partners scored relatively low on behavioral measures of sensitivity and supportiveness at the beginning of the study. Interestingly,
these long-term positive changes in within-relationship attachment organization were not explained by variations in baseline relationship satisfaction and were independent of participants’ global attachment orientations at the beginning of the study. That is, a partner’s (i.e., attachment figure’s) sensitivity and supportiveness predicted prospective decreases in within-relationship attachment insecurities in both chronically secure and chronically insecure participants.

An analysis of prospectively predicted changes in global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships yielded interesting results. Whereas behavioral indicators of a partner’s sensitivity and responsiveness at the beginning of the study predicted a significant decrease in global attachment anxiety over the eight-month period, there was no such effect on global avoidant attachment. Moreover, the slope of the change in relationship-specific attachment anxiety was significantly associated with the slope of the change in global attachment anxiety, but there was not a significant association between the slopes of change in relationship-specific and global avoidant attachment. That is, a partner’s sensitivity and responsiveness seemed to cause a gradual decrease in relationship-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance, which in turn brought about a more general reduction in attachment anxiety. However, these qualities in the partner, although they helped to reduce relationship-specific avoidant attachment, were not sufficient to reduce a more general avoidant orientation.

Overall, these new findings highlight the importance of a sensitive and supportive romantic partner as a transformative agent who can move a person toward greater security in a specific romantic relationship and reduce global attachment-related anxieties for at least eight months. The results also suggest that it is not so easy to induce change in a globally avoidant attachment style, even when a person is fortunate enough to have a loving and caring partner.

**BOOSTING ATTACHMENT SECURITY IN LEADER–FOLLOWER RELATIONSHIPS**

Organizational leadership provides another situation in which one person can act as a security enhancer for others. Popper and Mayseless (2003) proposed that there is a close similarity between leaders (e.g., managers, political and religious authorities, teachers, supervisors, and military officers) and other kinds of security-enhancing attachment figures. Leaders can occupy the role of “stronger and wiser” caregiver and thereby provide a secure base for their followers. In fact, descriptions of leaders in the psychological literature (e.g., House and Howell, 1992; Shamir, House, and Arthur, 1993; Zaleznik, 1992) suggest that especially effective leaders are ones who are available and responsive to their followers’ needs; provide advice, guidance, and emotional and instrumental support to group members; enhance and develop followers’ autonomy, initiative, and creativity; build followers’ sense of competence and mastery; and bolster their motivation to take on new challenges and acquire new skills. In other words, leaders can be responsive caregivers
(“good shepherds”) who provide their followers with a sense of security, courage, and desire for personal growth (Mayseless and Popper, 2007).

In line with this conceptualization of leader–follower relations, a sensitive and responsive leader, like other security-enhancing attachment figures, can have a strong effect on followers’ well-being, personal and team functioning, and personal development. Just as well-parented children become high-functioning adults, followers can become better, stronger, and wiser adults under the guidance of a talented and effective leader who exhibits mature judgment and prosocial values (suggesting his or her own attachment security and skill as a caregiver). According to Popper and Mayseless (2003), creating a sense of having a safe haven and a “secure base for exploration” (Ainsworth et al., 1978) in followers is a leader’s most effective method of increasing the followers’ self-esteem, competence, autonomy, creativity, and psychological growth. Moreover, providing a sense of security is the key to the beneficial changes a good leader can sometimes effect in maladjusted or troubled followers.

As in other cases of unavailable, insensitive, and unresponsive attachment figures, a leader’s inability or unwillingness to respond sensitively and supportively to followers’ needs can magnify followers’ anxieties, feelings of demoralization, or inclination to rebel (“protest,” in attachment-theory terms). Moreover, an unavailable, insensitive, or selfish leader can fuel followers’ attachment insecurities and hence either increase childish, anxious dependence on a destructive (e.g., totalitarian) figure or trigger a compulsively self-reliant dismissal of the leader’s support and assistance. In either case, a leader’s lack of concern and support can radically alter the leader–follower relationship and transform what began with the seeming promise of a safe haven and a secure base into a destructive, conflicted, irrationally hostile relationship that is self-defeating for leader, followers, and the organization to which they belong.

In two recent studies, Davidovitz et al. (2007) found strong evidence for the positive effects that a sensitive and supportive leader can have on followers’ performance and adjustment during military service. In these studies, we focused on leaders’ attachment insecurities (anxiety and avoidance) and the extent to which these insecurities impaired their functioning as security-enhancing attachment figures and contributed adversely to followers’ performance and mental health. In the first of two studies, 549 Israeli soldiers in regular military service, from 60 different military units that were participating in a leadership workshop, rated their instrumental and socioemotional functioning within their unit. Soldiers also rated (1) the extent to which their direct officer used power to serve and empower soldiers’ needs and aspirations and respected the soldiers’ rights and feelings—a style of leadership Howell (1988) called “socialized”—and (2) the extent to which their direct officer was an effective provider of instrumental and emotional support in demanding and challenging situations, core qualities of a security-enhancing attachment figure. The 60 direct officers completed ratings describing their performance as a socialized leader and an effective support provider for their followers. They also completed the Experiences in Close Relationships (ECR) Inventory, providing ratings of their own attachment anxiety and avoidance.

The data indicated that soldiers’ perceptions of their officers matched the officers’ self-reports. More avoidant officers scored lower on socialized leadership and were less able to deal effectively with their soldiers’ emotional needs. More
attachment-anxious officers were less able to provide effective instrumental support, which had a detrimental effect on the accomplishment of group tasks.

The study also revealed negative influences of an officer’s avoidant attachment style on his soldiers’ socioemotional functioning in their unit. These negative effects were mediated by avoidant officers’ lack of a socialized leadership style and lack of efficacy in dealing with soldiers’ emotional needs. It seems likely, therefore, in line with an attachment-theoretical perspective on leader–follower relations that a leader’s avoidance is associated with low sensitivity and supportiveness, which adversely affects followers’ socioemotional functioning. We believe it is likely that avoidant leaders alienate and demoralize followers and reduce the followers’ enthusiasm for group tasks.

We also found that an officer’s attachment anxiety has a negative effect on soldiers’ instrumental functioning, an association that is mediated by anxious officers’ lack of ability to provide instrumental support to followers in task-focused situations. We suspect that a leader’s attachment anxiety interferes with effective provision of a secure base for exploration and learning, which in turn erodes followers’ confidence in their own instrumental functioning. However, we also noted an unexpected positive effect of officer’s attachment anxiety on soldiers’ socioemotional functioning. It seems that an anxious officer’s emphasis on emotional closeness and interdependence helps soldiers become emotionally involved and interpersonally close. Alternatively, soldiers’ attempts to maintain good morale may be a defensive reaction of the group to the self-preoccupied anxieties of an attachment-anxious officer, a possibility that needs to be studied further (perhaps using some of the methods discussed in Chapter 8 in this volume). In any case, soldiers’ socioemotional benefits under these conditions seem to be achieved at the expense of deficits in instrumental functioning.

In the second of two studies, Davidovitz et al. (in press) approached 541 Israeli military recruits and their 72 direct officers at the beginning of a four-month period of intensive combat training and asked them to report on their attachment styles. At the same time, soldiers completed a self-report scale measuring their baseline mental health. After two months, soldiers reported on their mental health again and provided appraisals of their officer as a provider of security (i.e., the officer’s ability and willingness to be available in times of need and to accept and care for his soldiers rather than rejecting and criticizing them). Two months later (four months after combat training began) soldiers once again evaluated their mental health.

The results indicated that the more avoidant an officer was, the less his soldiers viewed him as sensitive and available and the more they felt rejected and criticized by him. More importantly, an officer’s avoidant attachment style and his lack of sensitivity and availability seemed to cause undesirable changes in soldiers’ mental health during combat training. At the beginning of training, baseline mental health was exclusively associated with soldiers’ own attachment anxiety. However, officers’ avoidant orientation and their lack of sensitivity and availability produced significant changes in soldiers’ mental health over the weeks of training (taking the baseline assessment into account). The higher the officer’s avoidance score and the lower his sensitivity and availability, the more his soldiers’ mental health deteriorated over two and four months of intensive combat training. These findings
support the metaphor of leaders as parents and highlight the importance of a leader’s secure attachment for the maintenance of followers’ mental health and emotional well-being during stressful periods.

The findings of our second study also indicate that soldiers’ attachment styles moderated the effects of their officers’ avoidant attachment scores on changes in mental health. Officers’ avoidance brought about a significant deterioration in soldiers’ mental health during the initial two months of combat training mainly among insecurely attached soldiers. More secure soldiers were able to maintain a relatively stable and high level of mental health despite being under the command of an avoidant officer. That is, soldiers who had either internalized a secure base earlier in development or were able to bring one with them, mentally, from home were able to escape the detrimental effects of an avoidant officer’s lack of nurturance.

Unfortunately, this buffering effect of soldiers’ security was evident mainly when mental health was assessed only two months after combat training began. After four months of combat training, an officer’s avoidance had negative effects on soldiers’ mental health regardless of the soldiers’ attachment orientation. In other words, as time passed and problems continued, the negative effects of an officer’s avoidant style on soldiers’ mental health overrode the initial buffering effects of the soldiers’ attachment security. It is important to remember that these findings were obtained during a highly stressful period in which soldiers were under the complete control of their officer and in a situation where their physical welfare depended on their obedience to the officer’s commands. Future studies should examine how leaders’ and followers’ attachment orientations interact in less extreme and less demanding situations and in other kinds of organizational contexts.

Overall, these two studies highlight the important effects that leaders’ attachment orientations and correlated abilities to serve as security providers have on followers’ performance, feelings, health, and adjustment. We should emphasize, however, that our studies were conducted in military settings. Future studies are needed to compare the findings with ones obtained in other organizational settings, including ones where there are more women. Systematic longitudinal research is also needed to address a host of unanswered questions, such as whether and how insecurely attached followers can benefit from the advantages of a secure leader; whether and how insecurely attached followers may resist, to their own detriment, a secure leader’s beneficial influences; and how secure leaders foster individual followers’ socioemotional well-being, relations among followers, and the success of the collectives to which they belong. A deeper understanding of these processes can help organizational psychologists create better leadership development programs and better interventions aimed at improving leader–follower relations.

GROUPS AS SECURITY-ENHANCING ATTACHMENT FIGURES

Supportive interactions in the context of groups can also bring about positive changes in group members’ attachment systems and thereby contribute to
their well-being, psychological functioning, and task performance. According to Mayseless and Popper (2007), emotional connections with a group or a network of group members can also be viewed as attachment bonds, and a group can serve attachment functions by providing a sense of closeness and of having a safe haven and a secure base (e.g., De Cremer, 2003; Simon and Stürmer, 2003; Sleebos, Ellemers, and de Gilder, 2006; Tyler and Blader, 2002). That is, people can use a group as a symbolic source of comfort, support, and safety in times of need and as a secure base for exploration, skill learning, and task performance. There is evidence that groups, like individual attachment figures, can be effective providers of emotional support, comfort, and relief in demanding and challenging times (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Mullen and Cooper, 1994); they can also encourage and support exploration and the learning of new social, emotional, and cognitive skills (e.g., Forsyth, 1990).

Following Mayseless and Popper’s (2007) reasoning, we propose that people can construe a group as a symbolic security-enhancing attachment “figure,” can form secure attachment bonds with the group, and can thereby benefit from the broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security made possible by these bonds. As with individual attachment figures, however, appraising a group as a security provider can be distorted by a group member’s global attachment insecurities. Insecure individuals may have difficulty construing their groups as available, sensitive, and responsive attachment figures. Indeed, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) constructed a self-report scale to measure group-oriented attachment anxiety and avoidance and found that group-oriented insecurities were positively associated with global attachment insecurities in close relationships.

However, Smith, Murphy, and Coats’s (1999) correlations were only moderate in size (see Chapter 10 in this volume), indicating that although group attachment insecurities may be reflections, or special cases, of global insecurities, they are also influenced by other factors, such as past and current experiences with specific groups. As in other relational contexts, the quality of actual group interactions probably moderates the projection of previously established attachment working models onto a particular group, with more comforting and supportive group interactions favoring the formation of a more secure attachment to the group. In other words, it seems likely that comforting and supportive group interactions can provide a foundation for beneficial psychological and organizational transformations.

As explained by Rom and Mikulincer (2003), although research on group dynamics was not influenced by attachment theory and research, studies that focused on group cohesion or cohesiveness, the best-researched group-level construct (e.g., Evans and Dion, 1991; Mullen and Cooper, 1994), provided indirect evidence concerning the security-promoting effects of supportive and encouraging group interactions. In these studies, group cohesion (or team spirit and solidarity), defined as the extent to which group members support, cooperate with, respect, and accept each other, consistently improved group members’ emotional well-being and promoted learning and effective team performance (e.g., Hogg, 1992; Levine and Moreland, 1990; Mullen and Cooper, 1994). From an attachment perspective, group cohesion refers to the extent to which a group is appraised by its members
as a security provider. The greater the group’s cohesiveness, the more its members feel comforted, supported, respected, accepted, and encouraged by the group. In other words, cohesive groups can definitely be viewed as security-providing symbolic attachment figures.

Pursuing this idea, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) conducted two studies (Studies 3 and 4 in a multi-study article) of new recruits in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), whose performance in combat units was evaluated in a two-day screening session. On the first day, participants completed a self-report scale tapping global attachment anxiety and avoidance in close relationships. On the second day, the recruits were randomly divided into small groups of five to eight members, and they performed three group missions. Following each mission, they rated their socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the mission. In addition, they rated the cohesiveness of their group. External observers also provided ratings of each participant’s socioemotional and instrumental functioning during the three group missions, and participants completed an additional measure at the end of the second screening day to register their anxiety and avoidance toward their group.

In both studies, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) observed the theoretically predicted projection of global attachment insecurities onto group-specific attachment orientations and the resulting effects on performance. Greater global attachment anxiety (in dyadic relationships) was associated with poorer instrumental performance in group missions (as assessed by both self-reports and observers’ ratings) and with higher self-ratings of group-specific attachment anxiety. In addition, global attachment avoidance was associated with lower levels of both instrumental and socioemotional functioning during group missions (again, as assessed by both self-reports and observers’ ratings) and higher ratings of group-specific attachment anxiety and avoidance.

Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that group cohesiveness (operationalized as a group-level variable created by averaging the appraisals of all group members) improved the socioemotional and instrumental functioning of group members and reduced the detrimental effects of global attachment anxiety on instrumental functioning during group missions. Moreover, group cohesion significantly attenuated group-specific attachment insecurities, whether anxious or avoidant, and weakened the projection of global attachment anxiety onto the group. This finding supports the hypothesis that group cohesion enhances group members’ sense of security, facilitates emotional well-being and more optimal functioning during group interactions, and mitigates chronically attachment-anxious people’s typical worries (e.g., about being rejected or disliked). A sense of group cohesion signals that closeness, support, and consensus—prominent goals of attachment-anxious people—have been attained, thereby freeing mental resources for exploration, learning, and task performance.

Interestingly, Rom and Mikulincer (2003) also found that, although group cohesion had an overall positive effect on functioning and group-specific attachment security, it failed to improve the functioning of avoidant military recruits. Some of the findings even suggested that a cohesive group exacerbated avoidant people’s poor instrumental functioning. As reviewed already, global avoidance seems to be more resistant than attachment anxiety to the presence of sensitive and supportive
romantic partners. This imperviousness seems to hold up even during group activities. Close, interdependent relations with group members may be so threatening or distasteful to avoidant people that they fail to benefit from a potentially available group-specific sense of security. Alternatively, group cohesion, which implies a very high level of interdependence among group members, may exacerbate rather than calm avoidant people’s attachment-related fears of closeness, thus threatening their sense of self-reliance.

Overall, Rom and Mikulincer’s (2003) findings provide preliminary evidence that cohesive group interactions, characterized by support, cooperation, respect, and acceptance between group members, can foster a group-specific sense of attachment security, can improve group functioning, and can have healing, ameliorative effects on attachment-anxious people. More research is needed on the psychological and interpersonal processes through which groups could help insecure adults revise their working models of self and others. Future studies should include prospective longitudinal designs, examining the extent to which group cohesion has long-term effects on group-specific attachment orientations and either is or is not capable of overriding previously established global attachment insecurities.

**THE THERAPIST AS A SECURE BASE**

According to Bowlby (1988), psychotherapy provides another relational context capable of supporting a broaden-and-build cycle of attachment security. In the therapy setting, as in other interpersonal contexts, the prerequisite for a client’s development is the therapist’s ability to function as a security-enhancing attachment figure. Bowlby drew an analogy between a psychotherapist and a primary caregiver: Just as an adequately sensitive and responsive mother—a “good enough” parent, in Winnicott’s (1965) well-known designation—induces a sense of attachment security in her child and facilitates the child’s exploration of the world, a “good enough” therapist serves as a safe haven and a secure base from which clients can explore and reflect on painful memories and experiences.

In this way, a good therapist becomes a security-enhancing attachment figure for the client (i.e., a reliable and relied upon provider of security and support). Clients typically enter therapy in a state of psychic pain, frustration, anxiety, or demoralization, which naturally activates their attachment system and causes them to yearn for support, comfort, encouragement, and guidance. Attachment needs are easy to direct toward therapists, because therapists, at least when a client believes in their healing powers, are perceived as “stronger and wiser” caregivers. Of course, clients’ appraisals of the therapeutic relationship as involving an attachment bond and of the therapist as an attachment figure can also turn the therapist into a focus for attachment-related worries, defenses, and hostile projections. These projections sometimes disrupt therapeutic work, but they also provide an opportunity for a therapist to make useful observations and interpretations, for the client to have corrective emotional experiences, and for the client to understand himself or herself better.
There is preliminary evidence that clients treat their therapist as a safe haven in times of distress. For example, Geller and Farber (1993) found that clients tended to think about their therapists mainly when painful feelings arose, and Rosenzweig, Farber, and Geller (1996) found that such thoughts produced feelings of comfort, safety, and acceptance in the clients. Parish and Eagle (2003) also found that clients rated their therapist as a stronger and wiser caregiver as well as a sensitive and supportive figure.

There is also evidence that a therapist’s functioning as a security-providing attachment figure has beneficial effects on therapy outcome. In a three-session career counseling study, Litman-Ovadia (2004) found that counselees’ appraisal of their counselor as a security-enhancing attachment figure (following the second session) was a significant predictor of heightened career exploration following counseling (as compared with baseline career exploration), even after controlling for counselees’ attachment orientations. This appraisal of the therapist as a security-enhancing attachment figure also mitigated the detrimental effects of attachment anxiety and avoidance on career exploration. In another study based on data from the multisite National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) Treatment of Depression Collaborative Research Program, Zuroff and Blatt (2006) found that a client’s positive appraisals of his or her therapist’s sensitivity and supportiveness significantly predicted relief from depression and maintenance of therapeutic benefits 18 months later. Importantly, the results were not attributable to patient characteristics or severity of depression.

The importance of forming a secure bond with therapeutic attachment figures is also evident in a recent study that examined the effectiveness of residential treatment of high-risk adolescents. Gur (2006) examined the course of emotional and behavioral problems of 131 Israeli high-risk adolescents during their first year in residential treatment centers. Four meetings were held with each participant, 1 week after beginning treatment and 3, 6, and 12 months later. At Time 1, participants completed a self-report attachment scale; they also completed measures of emotional and behavioral adjustment. In the three subsequent waves of measurement, participants completed the adjustment scales and rated the extent to which targeted staff members functioned as a secure base. The targeted staff members also rated participants’ adjustment and their own functioning as a secure base in the second, third, and fourth waves of measurement. In the fourth wave of measurement, adolescents again completed the self-report attachment scale to examine possible changes in their attachment insecurities.

The findings confirmed the theoretically predicted association between attachment insecurities and adjustment problems at the beginning of residential treatment. More importantly, findings indicate that staff members serving as a secure base contributed to positive changes in emotional and behavioral adjustment across the four waves of measurement and notably weakened the detrimental effects of baseline attachment insecurities. Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower rates of anger, depression, and behavioral problems as well as higher rates of positive feelings across the study period. Moreover, the functioning of staff members as a secure base was also associated with positive changes in the adolescents’ attachment representations.
Adolescents who formed more secure attachment bonds with staff members had lower scores on attachment anxiety and avoidance after their first year of residential treatment. Overall, the findings support the theoretical proposition that attachment security has healing effects even in the case of abnormally insecure, institutionalized youngsters.

Although these preliminary findings are encouraging, we need more controlled research that examines the long-term effects of security-enhancing therapeutic figures on clients’ working models of self and others and the extent to which changes in these representations are associated with therapy outcomes. More research is also needed on the temporal course of revisions in insecure working models during therapy and on the way particular features of therapist–client relations contribute to these revisions in the case of different kinds of emotional disorders.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In our previous research, we went to great lengths to test experimentally, in adults, the core claim of attachment theory that increasing a person’s sense of security can have personally and socially desirable effects on creativity, compassion, altruism, intergroup tolerance, and humane values (see the review in Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). In another subdiscipline, developmental psychologists who focus on parent–child relationships in decades-long prospective longitudinal studies have shown that security-enhancing relationships with parents and other caregivers have extensive and long-lasting beneficial effects on the personality development of children, adolescents, and adults (see Grossmann, Grossmann, and Waters, 2005; see also Chapter 11 in this volume).

Here, we have focused on similar processes that occur naturally, and sometimes deliberately, in romantic relationships, groups, leader–follower relationships, dyadic psychotherapy, and group-treatment contexts. Research findings indicate that security-enhancing romantic partners, leaders, and therapists and cohesive, high-functioning groups play a role in shaping individuals’ and groups’ effective functioning, well-being, and improvement over time. Much of the research reviewed here is preliminary, so many questions remain to be answered. We have noticed, for example, that avoidant attachment seems resistant to change. We suspect that this is because avoidant individuals deliberately resist the influence of loving, considerate potential attachment figures, having found in the past that reliance on others opens a person to disappointment, neglect, and psychological pain. But more research is needed to determine the validity of this speculation and learn how avoidant individuals might be made more amenable to constructive change.

The kinds of research and theoretical issues discussed here point to new possibilities for applicable research in personality and social psychology. Pursuing these lines of thinking and research should be beneficial to both the science of psychology and humanity at large. Psychologists have had a difficult time bringing their independent findings about personality, social contexts, development, and therapeutic processes together. Yet real personality development occurs in
social contexts, and social contexts have their effects through the personalities of parents, romantic partners, leaders, followers, therapists, and groups. Attachment theory provides a foundation for a truly integrative understanding of the relational contexts and processes that bring about positive changes in individuals, groups, and societies.

REFERENCES


Attachment Matters

Patterns of Romantic Attachment Across Gender, Geography, and Cultural Forms

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the extant literature on romantic attachment variability across gender, geography, and cultural forms. This review focuses on six specific questions:

1. Do the theoretical internal working models of attachment—models of “self” and models of “other”—underlie romantic attachment styles in the same way across all cultures (Bartholomew, 1990)?
2. Is the secure romantic attachment style normative across all cultures (i.e., is it the most common) (see van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999)?
3. Are East Asians particularly prone to preoccupied styles of insecure romantic attachment (Soon and Malley-Morrison, 2000), and if so, why?
4. Do cross-cultural patterns of attachment relate to local ecologies in ways that support or refute evolutionary theories of human sexuality (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991; Chisholm, 1999)?
5. Are there universal gender differences in romantic attachment, particularly in the dismissing form of romantic attachment (Kirkpatrick, 1998)?
6. Does cross-cultural variation in the magnitude of gender differences in romantic attachment support or refute various evolutionary and social role theories of human mating (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991; Eagly and Wood, 1999)?

Because research on adult romantic attachment has been greatly influenced by theories of childhood attachment (see Mikulincer and Goodman, 2006; Simpson and Rholes, 1998), I begin with a review of attachment theory and its relevance to adult romantic relationships (see also Chapter 4 in this volume).

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

According to Bowlby’s (1982, 1988) ethological theory of attachment, humans possess a behavioral-motivational system that emerges in infancy and protects children as they pass through several developmental phases (Marvin and Britner, 1999). Phase experiences that include responsive, supportive, and consistent caregiving are thought to adaptively leave children with an abiding sense of high self-worth and lasting feelings of comfort about depending on others. These thoughts and feelings eventually crystallize into internal working models or basic cognitive-emotional attitudes that securely assert that the self is valuable and worthy of love (i.e., children develop a positive model of self) and that others are valuable and worthy of trust (i.e., children develop a positive model of other).

Unresponsive, abusive, or inconsistent caregiving experiences, in contrast, are thought to leave children with negative or dysfunctional internal working models. Dysfunctional models may consist of a negative model of other (via distrust and low valuing of the parent), a negative model of self (via low self-esteem and sensitivity
to rejection), or negative models of both the self and others (Bartholomew, 1990). Eventually, these internal working models can unknowingly become stable parts of the child’s core personality: “Once built, evidence suggests, these models of a parent and self in interaction tend to persist and are so taken for granted that they come to operate at an unconscious level” (Bowlby, 1988, p. 130).

Evidence suggests internal working models of self and other do persist over time, affecting our ability to relate to others in close personal relationships well into adulthood (Fraley, 2002; Waters et al., 2000), at least at a general level (Overall, Fletcher, and Friesen, 2003). In the mid 1980s, researchers began to investigate how attachment styles and orientations might apply to people’s cognitive-emotional attitudes toward romantic love and sexual relationships (Hazan and Shaver, 1987). For example, variation in romantic attachment has been linked to individual differences in motivations for sex (Cooper et al., 2006; Schachner and Shaver, 2004), sexual coercion (Davis, 2006; see also Chapter 16 in this volume), and stalking (Wilson, Ermshar, and Welsh, 2006). Over the last decade and a half, a growing body of evidence has shown that attachment deeply influences the way people think and feel about their most important romantic relationships (Feeney and Noller, 1996; Klohnen and John, 1998). Variation in attachment has been linked to romantic relationship patterns of conflict, stress, and affects regulation (Mikulincer, Shaver, and Pereg, 2003; see also Chapter 11 in this volume), romantic satisfaction, love, and harmony (Brennan and Shaver, 1995), as well as the temporal duration of romantic relationships (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Simpson, 1999).

Even though many attachment researchers regard the key developmental processes of attachment—the processes that give rise to internal working models of self and other—as a human universal (Main, 1990; van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999), some have argued that the core assumptions of attachment theory are biased toward Western ways of thinking. For example, Rothbaum and colleagues (2000) questioned whether the secure base of attachment universally fosters adaptation through exploration and individuation. Indeed, many cultural differences have previously been implicated as moderators of childhood attachment behaviors (Ainsworth and Marvin, 1995). Because the two-dimensional model of self and other view of romantic attachment has not been widely examined in non-Western cultures (cf. Sümer and Güngör, 1999), it remains unclear whether this view of romantic attachment is a universal feature of human psychology or whether it differs in important ways across diverse human cultural forms.

**DO MODELS OF SELF AND OTHER UNDERLIE ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT STYLES IN THE SAME WAY ACROSS ALL CULTURES?**

Given the prominent role that culture plays in child development and parenting (Cronk, 1999; Gardner and Kosmitzki, 2002), in one’s attitudes toward the self and others (Glick, 2006; Markus and Kitayama, 1991), and in romantic relationship desires and dynamics (Tolman and Diamond, 2001; see also Chapter 2 in
this volume), it seems likely that internal working models of romantic attachment may be at least partly influenced or moderated by culture. The degree of this cultural influence is to a large degree unknown, however, because very few studies have simultaneously looked at romantic attachment styles across more than two cultures (cf. Sprecher et al., 1994). Only one study has examined the two-factor view of romantic attachment, based on models of self and other from the Relationship Questionnaire (RQ; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991), across multiple non-Western cultures (Schmitt et al., 2004a).

If internal working models of self represent feelings and attitudes toward the self across all cultures—including whether the self is lovable and worthy of attention (Bowlby, 1988)—then within each culture models of self as measured by the RQ should positively correlate with measures of self-worth (e.g., self-esteem as measured by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale; Rosenberg, 1965). The tendency for models of self to positively correlate with self-esteem was documented in a large cross-cultural study of romantic attachment across 56 nations—the International Sexuality Description Project (ISDP; see Schmitt et al., 2004a). This provided some evidence for the universality of the model of self construct. Moreover, model of self scores from the RQ were largely unrelated to measures unassociated with self-worth, providing cross-cultural evidence of the discriminant validity of the model of self construct. Similarly, the model of other scale from the RQ—理论 representing feelings and attitudes toward others (including whether others are valuable, dependable, and worthy of love)—was usually positively correlated with measures of prosociality (e.g., “agreeableness” as measured by the Big Five Inventory [BFI]; Benet-Martinez and John, 1998) and largely unrelated to measures unassociated with prosociality (see Schmitt et al., 2004a).

Based on the series of statistical tests originally used by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), Schmitt and colleagues (2004a) found conflicting evidence concerning the cultural universality of the two-dimension, four-category structure of romantic attachment. Some evidence clearly showed that the four-category structure was not universal across all cultures. For example, the four attachment scales of the RQ did not interrelate across cultures as predicted by the two-dimension, four-category model of Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). “Secure” and “fearful” forms of romantic attachment were negatively correlated, as predicted, in 63% of cultures, but “preoccupied” and “dismissing” attachment were negatively correlated in only 25% of cultures. The latter percentage clearly falls short of a “cultural universality” threshold. Of particular importance is the fact that specific world regions, and not just those cultures with smaller sample sizes, tended to fail tests of universality. For example, none of the seven African cultures displayed a significant negative correlation between secure and fearful attachment. In South and Southeast Asia, the secure–fearful relationships were equally inconsistent, with a peculiar correlation in the opposite of the predicted direction in Malaysia. Moreover, factor analyses demonstrated that the four categories of romantic attachment do not align as predicted within two-dimensional space in the world regions of South America, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and East Asia (see Schmitt et al., 2004a).
On the other hand, a considerable amount of evidence supported the universality of the basic two-dimensional structure of romantic attachment. For example, the factor analytic results suggested that two dimensions underlie romantic attachment across all world regions. In almost all individual cultures, models of self and other formed independent dimensions. In addition, there was evidence of convergent and discriminant validity for the model of self and model of other scales within most cultures, as noted previously. Individuals with more positive models of self tended to have higher self-worth but did not tend to have higher levels of prosociality. Individuals with positive models of other tend to have higher prosociality but did not tend to have higher self-worth.

Although it is difficult to draw strong inferences given the sampling limitations of the ISDP (e.g., almost all participants were college students; see Schmitt et al., 2004a), it may be reasonable to tentatively conclude that in nearly all cultures people possess basic cognitive-emotional attitudes that constitute romantic attachment models of self and other. These internal working models likely exist as pancultural constructs, forming independent dimensions that underlie romantic attachment types across cultures. However, the four categories or types of romantic attachment outlined by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991)—secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful—seem not to reside within this two-dimensional space in precisely the same way across all regions of the world. It is unclear why cultures would vary in romantic attachment structure, especially given the strong theoretical rationale for thinking that internal working models of self and other are elemental components of human psychology (Bowlby, 1988). Perhaps response biases or translation difficulties were to blame in the ISDP study. What is clear is that more work is needed to reveal why certain cultures vary in the psychological structure of romantic attachment.

Ultimately, if the underlying psychology of specific attachment styles is found to fluctuate across cultures, this may have important implications for our understanding of romantic relationship processes and outcomes (Schmitt, 2002, 2005a) as well as for treatments of attachment-related disorders in those cultures (Slade, 1999). For example, if fearful attachment was found to be unassociated with models of other in a given culture, the therapeutic emphasis in that culture for treating symptoms of fearful attachment should probably not focus on increasing the value that fearful patients place on others. Instead, clinical efforts would be more efficiently allocated toward increasing a Fearful individual’s positive attitudes toward the self (Blatt, 1995).

**IS THE SECURE STYLE OF ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT NORMATIVE ACROSS ALL CULTURES?**

Previous research has suggested that secure attachment is the most common type of parent–child attachment across cultures (van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999). The idea that most children develop (and should develop) secure attachment styles has been called the normativity hypothesis, and it is a core assumption of attachment
theory (though see Rothbaum et al., 2000). Empirically, it does appear that Secure parent–child attachment is the most prevalent form in Westernized cultures (Ainsworth, 1991), and several studies have documented the preponderance of secure parent–child attachment in non-Western cultures, including in Uganda (57% of children studied were classified as secure), China (68%), and Japan (68%) (see van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999). A logical implication of the normativity hypothesis, combined with the presumption that attachment styles are reasonably stable over time (Waters et al., 2000), is that secure attachment should be the most common form of romantic attachment across all cultures.

Given the large number of cultures in the ISDP (i.e., 56 nations across 10 major world regions; Schmitt et al., 2004a), evidence of universality in the ISDP would provide compelling support for the normativity hypothesis. Descriptive information from this diverse collection of cultures also may help to reveal why some clusters of romantic attachment across cultures deviate from this normative trend. In the ISDP, secure attachment was the highest rated form of romantic attachment across 79% of ISDP cultures, qualifying this as a “near universal” of human psychology (Schmitt et al., 2004a). However, secure romantic attachment was significantly lower than dismissing, preoccupied, or fearful romantic attachment in several cultures. In addition, the three forms of insecure attachment, in combination, were typically more prevalent than secure attachment. These results provide only qualified support for the normativity hypothesis.

Why is secure attachment not always the highest rated form of romantic attachment across cultures? One possibility is that the local ecologies of some individual cultures may naturally elicit more insecure forms of romantic attachment and sexual behavior (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991; Schmitt, 2005b). For example, in several African cultures—cultures that experience high levels of stress—insecure forms of romantic attachment tend to be quite high. In addition, the sociohistorical forces that presumably cause certain people to exhibit more interdependent or collectivist interpersonal orientations across cultures may similarly impact their basic romantic attachment orientations (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). In Japan and Taiwan, for example, levels of secure romantic attachment are lower than Preoccupied romantic attachment levels (see Schmitt et al., 2004a). Geographic variations in romantic attachment may be further caused by regionally shared religious, political, or socioeconomic factors.

In order to examine the geographic patterns of romantic attachment, Figure 5.1 displays the average model of self and model of other score across the 10 major world regions of the ISDP. Models of self and other are generally positive, suggesting most regions are typically secure in orientation. However, in Western Europe and Oceania the average model of other score drops below zero, suggesting people in these regions may typically develop dismissing romantic orientations. In contrast, the region of East Asia possesses an average model of self score nearing the zero point, a score that is dwarfed by their high model of other scores. In Southern Europe, as well, models of other are, on average, higher than models of self. It seems likely that regionally shared religious, political, or economic factors play a role in these patterned deviations from normative secure attachment.
ARE EAST ASIANS PARTICULARLY PRONE TO PREOCCUPIED ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT?

Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that Japanese individuals tend to evaluate the self primarily in terms of interdependent relationships. One's self-worth, it is argued, depends in large part on whether one's groups are collectively valued (see also Kitayama et al., 1997). This has led to the hypothesis that East Asian individuals would be particularly prone to preoccupied romantic attachments, given that they may strive for self-acceptance by focusing on the approval of highly valued others (e.g., Soon and Malley-Morrison, 2000).

According to findings from the ISDP, East Asian cultures are particularly high on the preoccupied form of romantic attachment (Schmitt et al., 2004a). This result may reflect the fact that in many East Asian cultures psychological validation (in this case romantic validation) is heavily dependent upon the opinion of others. Such a finding would be consistent with cultural variation in parent–child attachment (van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999). As expected, in the ISDP Schmitt and colleagues (2004a) found that national levels of preoccupied attachment correlated negatively with national rates of individualism (Hofstede, 2001), \( r(47) = -0.45, p < .001 \) (Figure 5.2). Thus, it appears that more collectivist nations such as those in East Asia tend to judge the romantic self primarily in terms of interconnectedness.
According to the evolutionary theory of human sexuality proposed by Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper (1991), early social experiences adaptively channel children down one of two reproductive pathways. Those people who are socially exposed to high levels of stress—especially insensitive or inconsistent parenting, harsh physical environments, and economic hardship—tend to develop insecure attachment styles that are associated with short-term reproductive strategies (see also Schmitt, 2005a). Individuals from social contexts with lower stress, such as people from cultures with ample resources, should develop more secure attachment styles that are associated with long-term reproductive strategies (Belsky, 1997). Chisholm (1999) argued further that in cultures with fewer resources, the optimal mating strategy is to reproduce early and often, a strategy rooted in high fertility rates, insecure romantic attachments, promiscuous sexual relationships, and an overall focus on short-term temporal horizons or future discounting (Wilson and Daly, 2006). In cultures that have abundant resources, the optimal strategy is to invest heavily in...
fewer numbers of offspring, a strategy associated with low fertility, secure romantic attachment, monogamous mating behavior, and long-term temporal horizons.

Findings from the ISDP largely supported these evolutionary theories (see Schmitt et al., 2004a). Those nations possessing higher fertility rates had higher levels of fearful and dismissing attachment. Those nations with lower human development indexes had higher levels of preoccupied, fearful, and dismissing attachment. Those cultures with lower gross domestic product (GDP) per capita had higher levels of dismissing, \( r(54) = -0.31, p < .01 \) (Figure 5.3) and preoccupied romantic attachment. Overall, it appears that the most consistent relationship is between indexes of cultural stress and dismissing attachment, a finding that supports Kirkpatrick’s (1998) assertion that dismissing romantic attachment, among the various forms of insecure attachment, is most closely associated with short-term temporal horizons (Chisholm, 1999) and includes short-term mating strategies (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991; Schmitt, 2005a).

**Figure 5.3** Gross domestic product (US dollars per capita in 1999) related to dismissing romantic attachment across 56 nations from the International Sexuality Description Project.

**ARE THERE UNIVERSAL GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT?**

According to the early studies of adult romantic attachment (e.g., Hazan and Shaver, 1987), no gender differences were thought to exist in romantic attachment
styles. Men and women were equally likely to be secure or insecure, a finding in line with the lack of observed gender differences in childhood attachment (Ainsworth et al., 1978). However, subsequent research using more continuous measures of adult romantic attachment, and employing the four-category model of attachment (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991), has found that men are significantly more dismissing in romantic attachment orientation than women. In a review by Kirkpatrick (1998), gender differences in dismissing attachment have been documented across numerous unpublished studies as well. Generally, dismissing attachment is associated with an avoidance of interpersonal closeness, a discomfort with emotional disclosure, and a desire for relational independence.

The finding of gender differences in dismissing attachment seems to fit with common beliefs about social and emotional differences between the sexes, with men usually seen as less emotional, less nurturing, and less willing to connect with others (Williams and Best, 1990). Men’s greater dismissiveness is consistent with self-report surveys of emotional distance and social restriction. In a review of literature on gender and emotion, Brody and Hall (1993) concluded that men were much less likely than women to express emotions associated with affiliation and social bonding (see also Geary, 1998). Men are also less likely than women to seek emotional support when coping with stress (Taylor et al., 2000). In a large meta-analysis of gender differences in personality traits (Feingold, 1994), men were shown to be less nurturing, trusting, and gregarious than women—a trait profile closely aligned with the dismissing form of romantic attachment. Research on romantic couples has revealed that men report less comfort with emotional closeness in their relationships (Feeney, 1994), whereas women more often complain of men’s lack of closeness (Buss, 1989a) and find more satisfying those men who show fewer indications of dismissing romantic attachment (Kirkpatrick and Davis, 1994). Even though within-sex variation in dismissing romantic attachment can be considerable (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991), several sources of evidence—social stereotypes, self-perception differences, coping responses, and romantic partner-reported reactions—all seem to converge on the notion that men, on average, are significantly more dismissing in romantic attachment orientation than women.

Still, the preponderance of studies that have profiled men as the more dismissing gender have been conducted in Western cultures, limited primarily to North America, Western Europe, and Australasia (Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998). In the ISDP, dismissing romantic attachment levels vary widely across non-Western cultures (see Schmitt et al., 2004a). Cultures from South America, Southern Europe, and East Asia display much lower levels of dismissing attachment than other parts of the world. Cultures from Africa, Oceania, and South and Southeast Asia tend to display heightened levels of dismissing romantic attachment. This cross-cultural variability in romantic attachment seems to mirror the results from previous studies of parent–child attachment (van IJzendoorn and Sagi, 1999).

Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae (2001, p. 327) found that gender differences in many personality traits, including those linked to dismissiveness such
as disagreeableness and introversion, were “most marked among European and American cultures and most attenuated among African and Asian cultures.” With substantive variation in dismissing romantic attachment across non-Western cultures, and with inconsistent gender differences in traits linked to dismissing attachment, it remains unclear whether gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment fully generalize to all cultural regions of the world. On the other hand, there are compelling theoretical reasons to expect pancultural gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment.

Many evolutionary psychological theories of romantic attachment would predict that gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should generalize across most cultures. For example, Kirkpatrick (1998) suggested that the psychology of dismissing romantic attachment is conceptually similar to the psychology of short-term mating, perhaps even synonymous with it (see also Belsky, 1997). Adults who report higher levels of dismissing romantic attachment tend to have more accepting attitudes toward casual sex and to engage in more promiscuous and indiscriminate sex than people with more secure attachment styles (Bogaert and Sadava, 2002; Brennan and Shaver, 1995; Stephan and Bachman, 1999).

In the ISDP, Schmitt (2005a) documented that short-term mating tendencies were linked with higher levels of dismissing attachment, more so than with any other form of romantic attachment. When combined with the evolutionary premise that men are designed to follow short-term mating strategies and desire indiscriminate sex more than women are (Buss and Schmitt, 1993; Schmitt et al., 2003b), this would imply that men may be designed in some ways to exhibit more dismissing romantic attachment orientations than women. Evolutionary psychologists have also argued that men’s natural dismissiveness serves an evolved function once in romantic relationships, one in which withholding emotions protects men against women’s probes into male commitment and fidelity (Buss, 1994). Based on these evolutionary perspectives, men may be more dismissing in romantic attachment than women across most cultures because of the evolved design features of men’s mating psychology.

It is important to note, however, that evolutionary psychology perspectives do not expect that all cultures should have precisely the same level of gender difference in dismissing romantic attachment or that gender differences must be large in magnitude across all cultures if the differences are due, in part, to evolved sexual differentiation. This is sometimes how evolutionary theories are portrayed, but it is a distorted picture of the evolutionary perspective on sexual differentiation (Mealey, 2000). If a psychological gender difference does not always appear in every culture, or is somewhat diminished across some cultures, this is not prima facie evidence that the gender difference is largely unrelated to evolved biology (Cronk, 1999). Instead, there are sometimes adaptive reasons why, even though men and women are biologically designed with a propensity to differ in certain ways, they sometimes fail to display the exact same amount of difference across all cultures. For example, evolved gender differences in behavioral aggression, expressed mate preferences, and physical height all seem to require certain developmental inputs before fully manifesting themselves and are sometimes designed
to vary in adaptively ways with local ecological and reproductive conditions (Gangestad, Haselton, and Buss, 2006; Low, 2000).

In the ISDP, small to moderate gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment emerged in most nations (Schmitt et al., 2003a). Expressed in terms of effect size, $d$ (see Cohen, 1988), previous research (e.g., Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) had reported gender differences in dismissing attachment were moderate in size (around $d = 0.50$). Many of the sex differences in the ISDP approached moderate levels of effect size. However, for most nations gender differences in dismissing attachment were only small in magnitude (around $d = 0.20$), with only 69% possessing a gender difference greater than 0.10. As seen in Figure 5.4, the expected gender difference in dismissive romantic attachment was not apparent in the world region of Africa, and the predicted gender effects were smaller in Oceania and East Asia than in other regions (Schmitt et al., 2003a). A few nations possessed the opposite of the predicted pattern, with women slightly more dismissive than men (e.g., Ukraine, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Botswana). Overall, these findings led Schmitt and colleagues (2003a) to conclude that greater male dismissiveness is only a “near universal” of human nature (Brown, 1991), and that some features of culture seem to attenuate its expression.

**Figure 5.4** Men’s and Women’s levels of dismissing romantic attachment across the 10 world regions of the International Sexuality Description Project.
DOES THE MAGNITUDE OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT VARY ACCORDING TO EVOLUTIONARY OR SOCIAL ROLE THEORIES?

As noted earlier, local ecological conditions likely have effects on levels of insecure romantic attachment (Schmitt et al., 2004a). Ecological conditions also may have a special impact on gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment. Some cultures possess high-stress reproductive environments (Chisholm, 1999; Keller, 1990). Cultures with high levels of pathogens and disease, for example, are thought to present high-stress reproductive environments because raising offspring in disease-prone environments is often associated with higher childhood mortality (see Gangestad and Buss, 1993; Low, 1990). Indeed, mortality rate (or low life expectancy) itself is a strong indicator of environmental or ecological stress load. Reproductive environments with high fertility rates and scarce resources can also be considered stressful because human children, relative to other primate species, require heavy parental investment and because raising multiple offspring makes it more difficult to invest the necessary amounts of care in each child (Trivers, 1972).

Evolutionary Psychology Theories

According to Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper (1991), when reproductive environments are particularly stressful women may be designed to shift away from their primary long-term mating strategy with its accompanying low levels of dismissing romantic attachment and instead develop a more short-term mating strategy with higher levels of dismissing attachment (see also Chisholm, 1999). In women, this adaptive shift to a dismissing or short-term strategy may have included early reproduction that allowed their family members to help raise offspring (Burton, 1990; Lancaster, 1989), mating with multiple men to garner resources or protection from more than one putative father (Hrdy, 1981; Smuts, 1985), and obtaining access via short-term mating to valuable men possessing “good genes,” genes that are better able to withstand the pathogens and developmental stressors of harsh environments (Gangestad and Simpson, 2000). Thus, women’s dismissing romantic attachment levels may be particularly culturally contingent, adaptively shifting in accord with the harsh physical environments (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991) and high fertility trends (Chisholm, 1999) of their local ecologies (see also Gangestad, Haselton, and Buss, 2006).

Men may also be driven toward short-term mating and dismissing attachment in high-stress reproductive environments, but the effect appears to be more pronounced in women (Ellis et al., 1999). Perhaps this is due to men having evolved to preferentially follow more of an unrestricted or short-term reproductive strategy (Simpson and Gangestad, 1991), at least when doing so was unlikely to have strong negative consequences on survival (Schmitt, 2004b; Schmitt and Buss, 2001; see also Chapter 19 in this volume). Thus, men’s culturally contingent movement to short-term mating and dismissing romantic attachment in high-stress reproductive environments may be less conspicuous or severe than women’s shift.
This evolutionary perspective on romantic attachment leads a series of predictions concerning the magnitude of gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment across cultures. First, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should be smaller in cultures with high-stress environments. This hypothesis is based, in part, on the notion that reproductively stressful environments trigger women’s tendency toward short-term mating, including the adaptive desire for briefly mating with men that possess “good genes” (Gangestad and Simpson, 2000). Because high levels of dismissing romantic attachment are indicative of short-term mating tendencies (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Simpson, 1999), and because men are typically more oriented toward short-term mating via indiscriminate sex than women are (Schmitt et al., 2003b), women’s levels of dismissing romantic attachment should become more similar to men’s in high-stress environments.

In the ISDP, in nations with higher stress levels (i.e., higher HIV/AIDS rates), as predicted the difference between men’s and women’s dismissing romantic attachment was reduced, $r(52) = -0.43$, $p < .001$. Life expectancy at birth was also strongly correlated with the difference between men’s and women’s levels of dismissing attachment, $r(54) = 0.52$, $p < .001$ (Figure 5.5). This relationship suggests that as environmental harshness and stress increases (indicated by a lower life expectancy), the gender difference in dismissing attachment decreases, as predicted by evolutionary theories of human sexuality. Finally, the lower the human

Figure 5.5  Life expectancy from birth (United Nations Development Programme, 2001) related to gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment across 56 nations from the International Sexuality Description Project.
development index for a country, the smaller the difference between men’s and women’s dismissing romantic attachment, \( r(52) = 0.48, p < .001 \), as predicted.

A second prediction is that gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should be smaller in cultures with higher fertility rates. Higher fertility levels are associated with less emotional investment in children, a trend that is linked across cultures with the development of dismissing forms of attachment (Chisholm, 1999). High fertility levels are also associated with short-term mating tendencies (Keller, 1990). Because high levels of dismissing romantic attachment are indicative of short-term mating tendencies (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Simpson, 1999), and because men are typically more oriented toward short-term mating via indiscriminate sex than women are (Schmitt et al., 2003b), women’s levels of dismissing romantic attachment should become more similar to men’s in cultures with higher fertility rates.

In the ISDP, fertility rates were negatively associated with the magnitude of gender difference between men’s and women’s dismissing attachment, \( r(52) = -0.38, p < .01 \). This confirmed that cultures with higher fertility levels tend to have reduced differences between men’s and women’s dismissing romantic attachment levels. Fertility rates were also positively associated with dismissing romantic attachment in men, \( r(52) = 0.24, p < .05 \), and slightly more so in women, \( r(52) = 0.38, p < .01 \). Again, this trend seemed to support the view that variation in dismissing attachment gender differences across cultures is more strongly driven by variations in women’s level of dismissing romantic attachment. When a culture has high fertility and high ecological stress, women’s dismissing attachment increases (more so than men’s), and the gender difference in dismissing attachment subsequently decreases.

**Social Role Theories**

In contrast to evolutionary theories, social role theories typically suggest that men and women may sometimes differ in manifest behavior, but not because they have innate sex-differentiated psychologies. When men and women appear to differ, it is argued, this is because they inhabit different social or gender roles and have received dissimilar socialization experiences throughout development (Eagly and Wood, 1999; Wood and Eagly, 2002). In this view, cross-cultural gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment likely stem from men’s pancultural socialization to be less comfortable with close emotional relationships than women and, conversely, from women’s universal socialization to be more nurturing and attendant to the emotions of others (Low, 1989). Moreover, once these men and women have been socialized into discrete gender roles, cognitive expectations concerning gender differences in emotional closeness would tend to pervade the activities of men and women throughout social life (Wood et al., 1997). Of course, a proximate social role explanation such as this leaves open the question of why men and women would be socialized differently across all cultures to begin with.

Eagly and Wood (1999) presented a version of social role theory in which they provided an evolutionary rationale for why men and women are socialized differently across all cultures, and they did so while maintaining an emphasis on
socialization as the primary causal agent of gender differences in sexual behavior. Eagly and Wood reasoned that physical differences between men and women, and the accompanying division of labor that those differences necessitated throughout human evolution, led to a long and consistent history of men and women filling different social roles or structures. Once in those social structures, men and women are assumed to make rational decisions that “maximize their outcomes within the constraints that societies establish for people of their sex” (Eagly and Wood, 1999, p. 413). So, although biological differences between men and women initially create different social roles, it is the developmental experience of inhabiting different social roles and structures that directly causes most psychological gender differences. Importantly, the degree to which men and women are forced to inhabit bifurcated gender roles, and eventually develop some degree of psychological difference, is something that can presumably vary across cultures (Williams and Best, 1990).

Using this social structure approach, Eagly and Wood (1999) went on to argue that many of the gender differences previously portrayed by evolutionists as biological adaptations, such as women’s universal preference for mating with partners that have good earning capacity (Buss, 1989b), are instead the result of historical and environmental factors that contribute to gender-differentiated social roles and socialization across cultures (cf. Gangestad, Haselton, and Buss, 2006). As evidence in favor of this position, Eagly and Wood noted that in cultures where women have more access to political and economic power, gender differences in desires for mating partners with resources were smaller (see also Kasser and Sharma, 1999). Thus, women’s pancultural desire for potential mates with resources can be seen as the reasoned consequence of inhabiting resource-depleted social structures, not a biological adaptation residing within women’s evolved mating psychology (Wood and Eagly, 2002).

From this social structure perspective, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment and emotional closeness may also result from biologically generated social role differences, especially the different family roles that men and women naturally inhabit. Of crucial importance is the social structure of women more often being assigned the task of child rearing:

The assignment of the majority of child rearing to women encourages nurturant behaviors that facilitate care for children and other individuals. The importance of close relationships to women’s nurturing role favors the acquisition of superior interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate nonverbally. (Eagly and Wood, 1999, p. 413)

In most cultures, young girls are usually channeled into nurturing social roles and are socialized to be sensitive to the emotions of others, including their young children (Pasternak, Ember, and Ember, 1997). Women’s gender roles and socialization experiences, it could be argued, are what cause lower levels of dismissing romantic attachment in women. Differences in the social structures that men and women inhabit as adults, and in the expectations of greater female nurturance in most
cultures, may help to reinforce these universal gender differences in emotional sensitivity and dismissiveness (see also Hofstede, 1998).

An important implication of this social structural perspective is that in cultures where women are more severely restricted to child rearing (i.e., cultures with “traditional” sex-role ideologies; see Williams and Best, 1990), gender differences in dismissing attachment should be larger because men and women have been forcibly channeled down separate social roles, with women experiencing more nurturing-based roles and social expectations. Within cultures that possess more “modern” or “progressive” sex-role ideologies, however, women are allowed to explore a wider array of social roles, including those that may involve less nurturing and the development of more dismissing attachment orientations. Indeed, both men and women enjoy less burdensome and gender-constraining social structures in cultures with modern sex-role ideologies. Consequently, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should be smaller, or perhaps even absent, in cultures where either gender can take on the role of family nurturer, “when men and women occupy the same specific social role, sex differences would tend to erode” (Eagly and Wood, 1999, p. 413).

This social role perspective on romantic attachment leads to a series of predictions concerning the magnitude of gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment across cultures. First, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should be smaller in cultures with more modern or progressive sex-roles ideologies. In the ISDP, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment were related to the overall level of “cultural masculinity” across the 49 nations that were part of both Hofstede’s (2001) IBM data set and the ISDP. Gender differences in dismissive attachment were unrelated to cultural masculinity levels, $r(47) = 0.12, p = .21$. The correlation was in the predicted direction, however, with higher cultural masculinity scores associated with larger gender differences.

Second, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment should be smaller in cultures where women have access to political and economic power. Women’s access to power across cultures has been associated with smaller differences in men’s and women’s sexual psychology (Eagly and Wood, 1999; Wood and Eagly, 2002). Thus, in cultures with more political-economic gender equality, men and women should be more similar in dismissing romantic attachment. Gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment were related to an index of political and economic equality across nations, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) (United Nations Development Programme, 2001). However, the GEM was not significantly associated with gender differences in dismissing attachment. The correlation that was found was in the positive direction, $r(34) = 0.08, p = .33$, suggesting that if a relationship does exist, women gaining more access to economic and political power is associated with larger differences between men and women. Gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment were also related to the level of “gender development” across nations. Gender differences in men’s and women’s levels of dismissing romantic attachment tended to increase as the Gender Development Index (GDI) increased, $r(51) = 0.49, p < .001$. Because the differences between men and women increase as women gain economic equality, these findings seemed to run directly counter to social role theory.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

This review addressed six specific issues concerning culture and romantic attachment. First, some evidence suggested that models of self and models of other serve as a fundamental two-dimensional structure of romantic attachment within most cultures, though these dimensions do not always underlie the categories of attachment in the same way across cultures. Second, in the ISDP secure attachment among adults was normative across only 79% of cultures. Third, East Asians appear particularly prone to preoccupied attachment. Fourth, cross-cultural patterns of attachment are related to local ecologies in ways that support evolutionary theories of human sexuality (Belsky, Steinberg, and Draper, 1991). It appears high levels of ecological stress lead to insecurities that activate an adaptive developmental path that involves insecure parent–child attachment, tendencies toward interpersonal distrust, and the pursuit of short-term reproductive strategies (Schmitt, 2005a). Fifth, gender differences in dismissing romantic attachment are only a “near universal” of human culture (Schmitt et al., 2003a). Finally, cultures with low life expectancy, poor human development, and high fertility rates display smaller gender differences in dismissing attachment. This may be due to women being more similar to men in short-term mating tendencies and expressing concomitantly higher levels of dismissing romantic attachment in such cultures (see Schmitt et al., 2003a). Greater political and economic gender equality was unexpectedly associated with larger gender differences in dismissing attachment across cultures, in direct contrast to social role theories.

REFERENCES


Cognitive Processes in Relationships
Is Love Blind? Reality and Illusion in Intimate Relationships

GARTH J. O. FLETCHER AND ALICE D. BOYES

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Love sees not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind.

William Shakespeare

INTRODUCTION

The view that everyday social cognition is generally rational, logical, and designed to detect the truth about ourselves and others has taken a fearful battering from psychologists over the last five decades. Research examining accuracy in personality judgments was alive and well from the 1920s to the 1950s but was brought to an abrupt halt by the publication of a devastating methodological critique by Cronbach (1955). In the aftermath of Cronbach’s seminal article, the question of the validity of lay social judgments was simply dropped, and researchers moved
to safer ground investigating the underlying processes involved in lay attributions (see Funder, 1999).

By the 1980s, however, doubts about the validity of lay social cognition had given way to bold claims that human social cognition was inherently flawed, biased, or even irrational (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). A flood of research investigating errors and biases in social cognition seemed to reveal that people are subject to a wide array of social judgment biases, including the fundamental attribution error, the false consensus effect, the confirmation bias, various self-referential and self-serving biases, and many more (for reviews see Fletcher, 1995; Krueger and Funder, 2004). Moreover, a persuasive and widely cited literature review by Taylor and Brown (1998) argued that a subset of such biases, including the tendency for individuals to adopt Pollyannaish self-perceptions and to exaggerate their self-control, is a marker of superior mental health, personal happiness, and healthy relationships.

The inevitable backlash duly appeared, with a rash of research and argument over the last two decades seeking to show that ordinary social cognition is not always (or even typically) wrongheaded or prone to producing illusions. Moreover, it has been argued that accuracy and truth in social judgments can be, and often are, good things to attain and do not doom people to sad, unhealthy lives with impoverished relationships (for reviews see Fletcher, 1995; Krueger and Funder, 2004).

Relationship researchers entered the fray with gusto about 12 years ago, and on both sides of the argument. One general model, which we term the love is blind thesis, reflecting the Bard’s lines at the beginning of the chapter, argues that normal, healthy, lay social cognition is typically positively biased and overly optimistic. According to this approach, the motivation to retain a positive and healthy level of self-esteem, and by extension a positive level of relationship esteem, is assumed to be a pervasive motive. A second general model, which we term the relationship reality model, proposes that people are often motivated by the desire to perceive the truth in relationship contexts (even when it is hard to handle), that such judgments are frequently accurate, and that a firm grasp of relationship reality is necessary for healthy functioning relationships.

We shall examine the evidence and merits for these two models in due course. It is important to note, however, that much is at stake in the outcomes of research and argument in this domain. For example, the entire field of mate selection, from an evolutionary psychological stance, is presaged on the assumption that certain qualities in a mate—attractiveness, kindness, status, and intelligence—would (and did) confer advantages in terms of reproductive success. Physical attractiveness, for example, is often regarded as a primary cue for “good genes,” whereas personality traits like ambition and kindness signal that the individual will be a supportive and effective parent and mate over long periods of time (Gangestad and Simpson, 2000). However, this argument assumes that individuals can (and do) pick up such information in a reasonably accurate fashion. If lay judgments of such qualities are (or were) hopelessly biased and inaccurate, then the use of such criteria could not have evolved as adaptations, and love would be truly blind.

In this chapter we initially lay out the cases for the two models in question (love is blind versus the relationship reality model). Second, we conceptually tease
apart the complex concept of bias, distinguish it from accuracy, and describe some relevant empirical findings. Third, we move to the study of accuracy in intimate relationships. Fourth, we briefly list some of the important predictors of bias and accuracy, taking particular note of when the predictors are dissimilar. Finally, we make some general theoretical points and attempt to integrate the findings.

OPENING GAMBITS

To recap, the love is blind thesis, in essence, claims that love generates overly sanguine views of close partners and relationships. Thus, unless they view their relationships through rose-colored glasses, individuals may find it difficult, if not impossible, to commit themselves to serious long-term relationships or to actively cultivate relationship happiness. Relationship happiness (and associated personal well-being) and the maintenance of illusions, thus, go hand in hand (Murray, 2001; see also Chapter 19 in this volume).

A plausible prima facie case, however, can also be made for the relationship reality model. This model proposes that individuals should typically be motivated to view and understand their partners and relationships accurately and that a firm grasp on reality is required for healthy personal and relationship functioning. Moreover, the way primary relationships are central to well-being, which is used to support the love is blind model, can also be used in support of this model. Close relationships can produce either long-term happiness or misery; thus, individuals should be powerfully motivated to use their cognitive talents to the full in divining the true nature of their partners and relationships. The extent to which judgments of potential partners as honest, warm, ambitious, or trustworthy are accurate would seem have profound implications for the future well-being of the individual.

Both models are therefore theoretically plausible. Moreover, both models are supported by extensive empirical evidence (for reviews, see Fletcher, 2002; Gagne and Lydon, 2004; Murray, 2001). Sandra Murray and her colleagues, for example, showed that people deal with doubts that might corrode commitment and trust by restructuring their judgments and stories of their relationships. Moreover, as love prospers, individuals tend to idealize their partners more, exaggerate similarities between themselves and their partners, and subsequently develop happier, more stable relationships (see Murray, 2001).

The relationship reality model, in turn, has broad-based empirical support. Key relationship evaluations (e.g., commitment, satisfaction, trust) are typically anchored in the objective realities of relationships, are observable by outsiders, and reliably predict the future course of relationships (see Fletcher, 2002). Individuals who evaluate their partners and relationships more positively also discuss relationship problems in a more constructive fashion (e.g., Fletcher and Thomas, 2000). People who are in love express themselves in powerful behavioral ways that are accurately picked up by both their partners and observers (see Chapter 3 in this volume). Finally, romantic partners also share similar relationship evaluations (e.g., Campbell et al., 2001), and the negativity of such evaluations is one of the best predictors of relationship dissolution (Karney and Bradbury, 1995).
We are, thus, left with striking paradox. On one hand, individuals tend to perceive and evaluate their romantic partners and relationships in enhancing, overly positive ways. On the other hand, they typically perceive and evaluate their partners/relationships in an accurate, reality-based manner. As noted by Fletcher, Simpson, and Boyes (2006, p. 92), “love seems to be both blind and to possess a firm grasp of reality.”

BIAS

Resolving the paradox just presented requires negotiation through a dense methodological and empirical thicket. To begin with, the concept of bias itself is a slippery customer. One way of defining bias is in terms of the way prior (lay) theories influence the way new information is processed. It is a truism (with countless research examples) that laypeople’s judgments are influenced by their prior beliefs, attitudes, or lay theories, if you will. The same phenomenon is also well demonstrated in the relationship literature. In the attribution field, for example, many studies have shown that prior evaluations of relationships influence the way individuals explain each others’ behavior (For a review see Fincham, 2001). For example, those in blissful relationships tend to write off their partners’ negative behavior with external attributions (e.g., explaining surly behavior with an attribution like suffering stress at work), whereas those in unhappy relationships tend to accept the deleterious implications of negative behavior with internal dispositional attributions (e.g., explaining surly behavior with an attribution like insensitivity).

In a similar vein, it has been reported that those in happier and more stable relationships exaggerate the extent to which they are similar to their partners (Murray et al., 2002), exaggerate the extent to which they were happy at prior times in their relationships (Karney and Frye, 2002), exaggerate the positive qualities of their partners (Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 1996a), and exaggerate the extent to which their partners resemble their ideal partners (Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 1996b), and the list could go on.

However, demonstrations of such bias do not show that people are systematically irrational, blind to the truth or are unscientific in any way. Scientists of all stripes quite properly use their theories to explain or interpret data routinely and pervasively (Fletcher, 1995) and weight the import of the data accordingly (a variant of Bayes’s theorem). In the same fashion, laypeople make judgments under conditions of uncertainty that reflect both the nature of the incoming data and their extant relationship theories (both local and general). For example, if Melissa is asked to make judgments about how similar she is to Owen along some personality dimensions, she will do so (in part) by accessing both her general and her local partner and relationship theories. If Melissa is in a very happy relationship, and she believes that more similarity in relationships produces more successful relationships (a common belief), this will quite rationally lead to biased judgments. In short, theory guided judgments, either scientific or lay, are (by definition) biased judgments.

Of course, if individuals routinely ignored the incoming data (e.g., behavior from their partners) and relied completely on their preexistent beliefs or lay
theories (including relationship evaluations), then this would certainly show love is blind (and that laypeople are irrational). But the research evidence does not show this. Instead it reveals that specific judgments and decisions in relationships are jointly determined by both preexistent knowledge or lay theories and new information and that relationship evaluations, beliefs, and so forth are not set in concrete but change in the face of new information (see Fletcher, 2002).

One of the most common benchmarks used in prior research to objectively assess bias is simply the relevant self-perceptions of the target being rated (e.g., Boyes and Fletcher, 2007; Gagne and Lydon, 2003; Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). This research consistently reveals that people tend to rate their partners more positively than their partners rate themselves, revealing a partner-serving bias. One of the reasons this is regarded as a particularly persuasive demonstration of bias is that the benchmarks (self-perceptions of the target) are themselves almost certainly on the positively biased side.

However, studies that rely on comparisons between two sets of means need careful interpretation (in this case comparing mean attributions of specific traits of the perceiver with mean self-judgments on the same trait of the target). Consider the following example (adapted from Fletcher, 2002), Henry rates Elizabeth (using 1–7 Likert scales) as being very honest (7), very sincere (6), sensitive (6), and moderately ambitious (5). Susan rates herself on the same dimensions as pretty honest (5), quite sincere (4), reasonably sensitive (4), and not very ambitious (3). This pattern (consistent with the research evidence) shows that Henry is positively biased (he is on average two units more positive than Elizabeth’s self-assessments). However, it is also apparent that Henry is accurately tracking Elizabeth’s self-ratings across the four traits (with a correlation of 1.0). It is easy to demonstrate, with different patterns of hypothetical results, that Henry could also be biased and inaccurate, or unbiased and accurate, or unbiased and inaccurate. In short, bias (assessed by comparing mean levels of positivity for the perceived judgments versus the reality benchmarks) and accuracy (assessed by using correlations between the perceived judgments and the reality benchmarks) can be independent.

This analysis suggests it is possible to have the best of both worlds—to adopt a rose-tinted view of a relationship and partner yet simultaneously appraise them in a realistic fashion. Thus, this distinction may be a (partial) solution to the conundrum previously described. Indeed, studies that have assessed both bias and accuracy (along the lines previously illustrated) support such a conclusion. Murray et al. (2002), for example, found that women who are more egocentric (i.e., who view their partners as more similar to themselves than is warranted—an example of bias) tended to understand their partners more accurately. Sprecher (1999) found that, over time, individuals involved in dating relationships retrospectively rated their earlier levels of love and satisfaction as being on a higher upward trajectory over time than was in fact the case (an example of bias). For example, those individuals who actually had level trajectories of satisfaction over time in the past tended to recall that they had steadily become happier over the same period. Nevertheless, the sample overall quite accurately retrospectively tracked and reported relative increases or decreases in love and satisfaction over past periods in their relationships. And, finally, Eply and Dunning (2006, Studies
3 and 4) found evidence that individuals are positively biased when predicting how long their relationships would last but are also quite accurate.

Finally, in response to our prior arguments, a critic could plausibly argue that although both scientists and laypeople are typically biased in that they both interpret data in the light of preexisting theories, a crucial difference is that scientists are explicitly aware of such bias, whereas laypeople remain blithely unaware of such influences, and will often deny they are biased (Ehrlinger, Gilovich, and Ross, 2005). Indeed, researchers almost invariably treat biased relationship judgments as products of unconscious, intrapsychic processes. This seems a reasonable assumption given that if people recognized that their partner judgments were more positive than warranted by reality, it seems (at face value) that such metaknowledge would be likely to undercut the original beliefs.

Yet it is possible, even plausible, that people may consciously desire positively biased appraisals from their partners and may be aware (at least to some extent) of the way such appraisals (from partner to self or self to partner) may be, in reality, positively biased. First, the idea that love in intimate relationships distorts the accuracy and objectivity of interpersonal judgments is a plausible and culturally accessible notion. For example, there exist well-known proverbs making this point (e.g., “love is blind”; “a face only a mother could love”). Literature, plays, and movies also frequently embody the same idea. Second, a garden-variety interaction in intimate relationships involves reassuring the partner about doubts or negative self-perceptions. For example, when Mary wonders aloud about her academic ability, or whether she will get a new job, or if she is too fat, then her partner is likely to assure her she is smart, that she has a good chance of landing the job, and that she looks great. Indeed, it may be a normative requirement in (happy) intimate relationships that partners should provide supportive feedback in such circumstances, even if it means gilding the lily.

Boyes and Fletcher (2007) tested such speculations in three studies. In Study 1, they found that participants rated fictional partners in very happy relationships as more unrealistically positively biased (in their partner perceptions) as compared with fictional partners in moderately happy or unhappy relationships. Thus, people seem to believe that love does indeed distort people’s perceptions. In Study 2, a sample of individuals in existing romantic relationships both desired and believed that they were judged by their partners in a positively biased fashion (on key mate selection dimensions such as attractiveness, warmth, and ambition). Critically, they also believed they were unrealistically biased in their perceptions of their partners. In Study 3, using a sample of couples, it was found that such metaperceptions of bias were anchored to actual levels of bias at the individual and relationship level. Taken together, these findings suggest that positive bias in partner judgments can be a normative and consciously accessible feature of intimate relationships.

Importantly, the knowledge that people exhibited of the levels of bias in their relationships was not a function of relationship quality, relationship length, self-esteem and depression—controlling for these factors did not change the results in any of the relevant analyses. Thus, the accuracy attained by individuals was not merely a product of individuals accessing and using overall evaluations of
That people realize their partners’ perceptions of self are biased is relatively unproblematic theoretically. However, participants in this research also believed (correctly) that their own perceptions of their partners tended to be positively biased, and this may seem counterintuitive. If people are aware of such biases, then why do they not adjust for them when asked to straightforwardly rate their partners’ qualities? Boyes and Fletcher (2007) proffered the explanation (not original we hasten to add) that the social mind is split into two basic components that appear contradictory but that may be cognitively walled off in some way from one another and, thus, may coexist quite happily. One component is designed for accuracy and the search for truth, whereas the other component is concerned with producing a feel-good orientation and functions to maintain a cheerful and optimistic approach to life. Laypeople, on this view, are both scientists and cheerleaders, capable of switching rapidly from one mode to the other depending on the demands of the situation, their levels of motivation, and so forth.

Note that Boyes and Fletcher (2007) did not claim that the findings from this research will generalize to every kind of judgment or underlying process. They argued that lay meta-awareness, and associated accuracy, in judgments of bias in relationship settings will be enhanced by two criterial features, both found in their research. First, the existence of an accessible and relevant folk theory or belief (e.g., love is blind) should sensitize individuals to the occurrence of related positive biases. Second, if the judgments in question—such as self and partner judgments of attractiveness—are embodied in frequent interpersonal behavior (e.g., explicitly discussed) the biases will become observable in action and thus, will be more likely to be noticed and recalled.

ACCURACY

We have already established that bias (however it is measured) is endemic in intimate relationship contexts. But how accurate generally are people in relationship settings? The answer is that studies generally reveal quite respectable levels of accuracy obtained by the judges (usually in the $r = .20$ to $.60$ range), using a range of external criteria/variables, including self-reported perceptions by relationship partners (e.g., Thomas and Fletcher, 2003), perceptions of observers of the relationship (e.g., Collins and Feeney, 2000), observer ratings of behavioral interactions (Simpson, Orina, and Ickes, 2003) or (using longitudinal designs) memories or predictions that can be matched with self-reports gathered either previously or later (e.g., Sprecher, 1999).

From an evolutionary angle (as previously noted) it is especially important to know how accurate people are in assessing attributes that are pivotal in mate selection contexts, including physical attractiveness and personality traits such as warmth and kindness. The evidence shows that physical attractiveness is rated quite accurately on the basis of quite minimal observations or interactions. For example, Marcus and Miller (2003) had participants rate their own physical
attractiveness and that of other men and women who were sitting together in small groups. There was good consensus on the level of attractiveness for specific targets, and targets’ self-perceptions generally matched well with how they were perceived (correlations ranging from .28 to .53). Moreover, individuals’ metaperceptions of how they were perceived generally by others were accurate (with correlations ranging from .26 to .49). As the authors conclude, “We know who is handsome or pretty, and those who are attractive know it as well” (p. 344). From an evolutionary standpoint, one would also expect men to produce particularly accurate perceptions of women’s attractiveness and women should be on the money when it comes to judging how they are rated by men. Both predictions were confirmed. The highest level of consensus was reached by different men rating the same women (41% of the target variance), and the most accurate meta-awareness was achieved by women rating how they were generally perceived by men ($r = .49$).

In contrast to physical attractiveness, the accuracy of rating strangers in terms of traits such as warmth and kindness is typically abysmal but does climb to quite respectable levels as a function of increased closeness and knowledge of the target (Funder and Colvin, 1988; Letzring, Wells, and Funder, 2006; Thomas, 1999). For example, Thomas had individuals observe men and women currently involved in sexual relationships having a five-minute discussion of capital punishment and then rate each partner on the Big Five Index (BFI) traits. Self-observer agreement was low for all five categories when strangers carried out the task (mean $r = .10$), considerably higher when friends carried out the same task (mean $r = .34$), and even better when partners rated each other (mean $r = .41$). Consensus across raters told the same story, with good agreement across partners and friends when rating the same targets (mean $r = .34$) and weak consensus across strangers and either partners and friends (mean $r = .09$).

One important subset of studies has compared the accuracy of observers (i.e., people who know one or both relationship partners well) with relationship insiders (i.e., the relationship partners themselves). The results of these studies have been mixed. MacDonald and Ross (1999), for example, found that college students made more positive but less accurate predictions about the longevity of their current dating relationships than either their roommates or their dating partners’ parents. However, this result was not replicated by Loving (2006), who also found (as did MacDonald and Ross) that the best predictors consisted of the daters’ self-reported levels of commitment. Thomas and Fletcher (2003) used a mind reading paradigm in which long-term dating couples initially engaged in a problem-solving discussion. After the discussion, each individual reported the private thoughts and feelings that he or she had during the discussion. Each individual then tried to infer the thoughts and feelings of his or her partner during the discussion as accurately as possible. Mind reading accuracy (i.e., empathic accuracy) was assessed by having raters compare the thought and feeling inferences of each individual against the actual thoughts and feelings reported by his or her partner. Relationship partners were significantly more accurate than either the close friends of each couple or total strangers (who also viewed the videotaped discussions and completed exactly the same tasks). The research suggests that, at least sometimes, the extra
information and knowledge afforded by being a relationship insider trumps the additional objectivity and freedom from bias gained by being an outsider.

**PREDICTING BIAS AND ACCURACY**

In addition to the research just described, increasing attention has been given to the prediction of accuracy and bias in intimate relationships. Consistent with our developing argument, it turns out they often seem to have different antecedents. This is not the place for an extensive literature review, but a selection of illustrative research examples should suffice to make the main points.

First, various individual differences have been found to predict accuracy and bias in relationship contexts. Women have been found to be superior mind readers to men (Thomas and Fletcher, 2003) and do better than men in predicting the likelihood of their relationships breaking up (Loving, 2006). There are also scattered findings suggesting that those higher in social intelligence and IQ produce more accurate mind reading in relationship contexts (see Fletcher, 2002). Mario Mikulincer and his colleagues reported evidence in several studies that more securely attached individuals are less prone to defensively bolster a biased sense of either consensus or uniqueness (for a review see Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005).

Second, there is good evidence that situational factors also play a role, particularly as they interact with individual differences such as attachment working models. For example, when the relationship is under threat, anxious-ambivalent individuals become more accurate in mind reading the extent to which their partners find other individuals attractive, whereas secure individuals are motivated to become less accurate (see Ickes and Simpson, 2001).

Third, the nature of the judgment also seems to be a central moderating factor in predicting bias and accuracy. Boyes and Fletcher (2007, Study 3) found that individuals evinced large and significant amounts of positive bias for partner judgments that are central to intimate relationships (e.g., sexy, warm) but were much more evenhanded for judgments that were more peripheral to mate selection and the evaluation of ongoing relationships (e.g., talkative, organized). Moreover, these results controlled for the degree of globality of the judgments (reflecting prior research, in this study globality and relationship relevance of a range of attributes, as rated by a set of observers, correlated positively; \( r = .44 \)).

Fourth, the nature and stage of the relationship also seem to have complex links to both bias and accuracy. As reviewed earlier, a commonly replicated finding shows that more positively biased partner and relationship perceptions are associated with greater relationship satisfaction. However, studies examining the link between accuracy and relationship satisfaction have reported a more inconsistent pattern of findings, with weak or null findings often reported (e.g., Acitelli, Kenny, and Weiner, 2001; Ickes and Simpson, 2001; Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 1996a, 1996b; Thomas and Fletcher, 2003). Even so, certain variables may moderate the accuracy–satisfaction link. In Thomas and Fletcher’s (2003) mind reading study, for example, among partners involved in longer-term relationships more accurate partner mind reading predicted greater relationship satisfaction. Among those
involved in shorter-term relationships, on the other hand, more accurate partner mind reading actually predicted less satisfaction. Thomas and Fletcher speculated that the problem-solving discussions might have been more threatening to individuals involved in newer relationships, which could have generated more defensiveness and, therefore, less accurate partner mind reading. In a consistent vein, Campbell, Lackenbauer, and Muise (2006) reported that when individuals in romantic relationships (who had negative self-perceptions) were given bogus feedback about the extent to which their partners agreed with their self views, their responses depended on the length of the relationship. Those in newer relationships were more likely to prefer positively biased views, whereas those in long relationships felt more valued and closer to their partners when they received harsher but more realistic assessments.

Fifth, it has been argued that different motives may push the levels of bias and accuracy around. For example, Simpson, Fletcher, and Campbell (2001) proposed that the love is blind and the relationship reality models described previously are represented in lay cognition in terms of two central motives: (1) a feel-good, optimistic stance; and (2) a reality-based desire to seek out the truth. The best evidence to date for this proposal has been provided by Faby Gagné and her colleagues (see Gagne and Lydon, 2004, for a review), who carried out a series of studies in which they manipulated a deliberative (predecisional) versus an implemental (postdecisional) mind-set. For example, in one study, (Gagne and Lydon, 2001, Study 3) individuals in dating relationships were required to either describe the pros and cons of an undecided relationship project (e.g., should they live together) or to describe how they planned to achieve a project to which they were already committed (e.g., finding a suitable apartment). Participants who were encouraged into a rational, evenhanded, deliberative frame of mind produced considerably more accurate predictions concerning how long their relationships would last compared with those who were making the same prediction while in an esteem–maintenance, implemental mind-set.

INTEGRATION AND CONCLUSIONS

To begin integrating these findings in a powerful explanatory fashion, it is helpful to locate them in the general context of what else we know about intimate relationships and to apply standard approaches that have already proved their mettle in the scientific marketplace including evolutionary and social psychological theories.

First, findings that women are more accurate than men in mind reading their partners and predicting the fate of their relationships are consistent with a raft of findings suggesting that women are generally more motivated and expert lay psychologists than men (for a review see Fletcher, 2002). We think the most plausible and parsimonious explanation for this gender difference is in terms of parental investment theory (Trivers, 1972): Namely, women invest in children and the sexual relationship more than men and are thus programmed to be more motivated lay psychologists in intimate relationship contexts (see Chapters 3 and 5
in this volume). The costs for women of getting it wrong in intimate relationship settings are slightly higher than for men.

Second, a psychological evolutionary approach suggests that we should look to the possible functions of endemic biases in social perception (see Haselton and Nettle, 2006). From an evolutionary approach, love is an evolved mechanism that bonds individuals together in a powerful and committed fashion in order to enhance the support and care given to offspring and thus to increase the chances that the parents’ genes are sent into the future (see Chapter 3 in this volume). The rose-tinted, optimistic, eyes of love are, on this account, simply part of this bonding mechanism. On the other hand, an evolutionary approach would also suggest that when the costs of getting decisions wrong are momentous (as they surely are in mate selection or retention contexts), then people should be motivated toward achieving accurate and balanced judgments of their partners and relationships.

Third, the distinction we made between bias and accuracy, and the associated research, goes some way toward resolving this conundrum. Individuals can (and often do) embrace a charitable, optimistic view of their partners, while simultaneously keeping a realistic track of their partners’ traits and qualities (it seems that people can have their cake and eat it too). There is also a long list of conditions that seem to restrict the operation of such biases. There is evidence that such rose-tinted biases are largely confined to traits that are highly relevant to the success of intimate relationships (e.g., warmth, attractiveness, ambition) and may not extend to any and all traits and characteristics. In addition, there is evidence that individuals (even those in love) are capable of reverting to a more rational and realistic way of thinking, depending on the conditions and the goals of the perceiver. Thus, being asked to move to another city and give up an existing job (a substantial elevation in commitment) by one’s partner in the throes of a romantic fling may well motivate a detailed and even exhaustive analysis rather than prompt an immediate romantic leap into the unknown. Finally, individuals involved in romantic liaisons seem to be aware at some level that their perceptions are biased and not entirely veridical, which implies that a cognitive retreat to a more realistic set of appraisals is always a possibility.

Fourth, the picture generated by the research is also consistent with a social psychological approach that emphasizes the centrality of interactions between the person and the situation in explaining and predicting affect, behavior, and cognition. Indeed, the research suggests interactions are par for the course. To pick one example, the link between relationship satisfaction and accuracy appears to be moderated by the length of the relationship—at the early stages of relationships more accuracy is associated with less happiness; at the later stages the opposite pattern seems to hold. To pick another example, the presence of threat in a close relationship (e.g., the presence of an attractive and available alternative mate for one’s partner) motivates secure individuals to misread their partners’ thoughts and feelings, whereas anxious individuals become more devastatingly accurate in such mind readings.

To conclude, it seems clear that the confidence and ability to commit to long-term sexual relationships are facilitated by the production of positively biased interpretations, personality attributions, and mind readings of the partner and
relationship. However, it is equally apparent that people in happy and successful relationships also typically develop accurate and prescient beliefs and perceptions of their partners, with the ability to remove their rose-colored glasses when the need arises. Investigating the way people manage the feat of maintaining and using appropriately both sets of goals and judgments promises to reveal important insights into the nature of the intimate relationship mind.

REFERENCES


Knowing When to Shut Up
Do Relationship Reflections Help or Hurt Relationship Satisfaction?

LINDA K. ACITELLI

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DO RELATIONSHIP REFLECTIONS HELP OR HURT CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS?

At a social gathering of psychologists almost 20 years ago, I was having a conversation about my research interests, when one man said, “Whenever a woman says, ‘I want to talk about our relationship,’ it makes my boots squeak.” Eager young scholar that I was, I laughed but was too shy to tell him that my research showed that even though he was more witty than most, his response was typical, especially for males. Men are more likely than women to feel that talking about the relationship means that there is something wrong and that he’s to blame. The imagery that
was evoked by his witty comment stayed with me all these years, and so did my motivation to figure out whether thinking and talking about the relationship with one’s partner was good or bad for an intimate relationship.

As such, the concept of relationship awareness was introduced to provide a general framework for the study of thinking and talking about relationships (Acitelli and Duck, 1987). This chapter begins with a general definition of relationship awareness and discusses its development as a construct. Different forms of relationship awareness are delineated, and relevant research is discussed. A goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that attending to the relationship has consequences for relationship outcomes, such as stability, satisfaction, tension, and positive interactions. Therefore, the chapter focuses on research that examines the association between attending to the relationship (in its various forms) and relationship outcomes. Integrating literature from communication studies, social, clinical, and health psychology is instrumental in articulating implications for future research on relationship awareness.

WHAT IS RELATIONSHIP AWARENESS?

Relationship awareness consists of relational foci of attention (Chapter 8 in this volume). It includes focusing attention on one’s relationship or on interaction patterns, comparisons, and contrasts between partners in a relationship including attending to the couple or relationship as an entity. Relationship awareness can include internal representations and conscious reflections about a particular relationship. This concept was originally theorized to be a key component of intimacy that had been overlooked in the existing work on relationships in general and intimacy specifically (Acitelli and Duck, 1987).

Definitions of intimacy vary widely, but the common thread among the various definitions is that intimacy is a multifaceted concept that contributes to the quality of close relationships (Prager, 1995; Reis and Shaver, 1988). Early work posited that personal self-disclosure (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Derlega, 1984) was the hallmark of an intimate relationship. What seemed to be missing from the literature then was the idea that reflecting on one’s relationship could be a crucial process that might enhance the quality of a relationship or at least influence its outcome. Instead of talking about the self, Acitelli and Duck (1987) proposed that talking about the relationship would be more likely to promote increases in intimacy between partners. What began as an attempt to fill the gaps in theorizing about intimacy resulted in a program of research that elaborated on the different forms, functions, predictors, and outcomes of relationship awareness.

Early work made the important distinction between thinking and talking within the context of a relationship and thinking and talking about the relationship (Acitelli, 1993). Cognition and communication may occur within the context of a relationship yet not focus on the relationship per se. For example, one partner may reflect on the other partner’s attributes, thinking about how “her smile lights up a room,” and may even tell her so. The thought and speech are focused
on an individual partner within a relationship context but are not focused on the relationship itself. However, if the partner were to think that the way she smiles melts his heart, then the partner is beginning to focus on the relationship because he is acknowledging something about her that attracts him and perhaps forms a connection between them. He might even focus more squarely on the relationship by telling her that he likes the way they make each other smile, thereby making a comment on their compatibility as a couple.

Recent work has begun to recognize more ways that attention can be focused on the relationship (Acitelli, 2001; Acitelli and Badr, 2005; Harvey and Omarzu, 1997; see also Chapter 8 in this volume). The obvious behavioral manifestations or two forms of relationship awareness are thinking and talking about a relationship. On the other hand, the extent to which such awareness is explicit can modify these forms. Similar to social awareness (Wegner and Giuliano, 1982), relationship awareness can be explicit or implicit. Wegner and Giuliano delineated two forms of social awareness. Focal (or explicit) social awareness requires that the social group to which one belongs is the object (or target) of perception. Tacit (or implicit) social awareness is when the social group becomes the lens through which one makes observations. Instead of thinking explicitly about one’s social group (e.g., “I am among a group of fellow researchers”), people can be tacitly aware of the group to which they belong as an entity and might think and talk in ways that imply similarity to or inclusion in a group. For example, attending research conferences, conveying an interest in research, and thinking of researchers as colleagues implies tacit social awareness of the group to which one belongs. The group becomes the lens through which members view the world.

Extending the reasoning of Wegner and Giuliano (1982), the distinction between explicit relationship awareness and implicit relationship awareness can be made, highlighting the difference between topics of thought (e.g., the relationship) and the thinker’s perspective (e.g., a “we” vs. “me” orientation), respectively (Acitelli and Badr, 2005). Thus, there are four related forms of relationship awareness that can be depicted in a $2 \times 2$ table. Figure 7.1 describes the four forms and provides examples of each form.

Explicit thinking about the relationship includes controlled, conscious cognition focusing on interaction patterns between partners or on the relationship as an entity. It involves a metaperspective of the relationship in the sense that the thinker is viewing the relationship with some cognitive distance as an object or topic of thought. An explicit focus (thoughts or speech) is often evaluative (e.g., “We have an affectionate [antagonistic] relationship”) even when seemingly describing interaction patterns (e.g., “When I come home, he kisses [ignores] me”).

Explicit talking about the relationship can involve metacommunication or communicating about partners’ communication or interactions (e.g., “Your tone of voice makes me uncomfortable [feel safe].”). Such talk, like explicit thinking may be viewed as the expression of a metaperspective of the relationship by commenting on interaction patterns (e.g., “I feel good about the way we get along”; “I don’t like it when we argue about little things.”)
Implicit thinking about the relationship is relatively unconscious, uncontrolled, and automatic. It involves having a couple identity or viewing oneself as part of a couple (Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999). Having a couple identity is also known as cognitive interdependence (e.g., Agnew and Etchenberry, 2006) in which members of a couple come to think of themselves as part of a collective unit that includes the other partner—for example, “Kevin will no longer think of himself simply as Kevin. Instead, he will regard himself more and more as part of a collective Kevin and Cathy unit” (ibid., p. 282). Being part of a couple can provide an orientation from which to interpret partner interactions, and is more likely to result in positive, than negative interpretations (Brewer and Gardiner, 1996; Wegner and Guiliano, 1982).

Implicit talking about the relationship refers to speech in which the partner uses first-person plural and possessive pronouns (i.e., we, us, our, ours) when talking about both partners in the relationship. Such talk functions to represent the self as part of a couple. For example, instead of saying, “I had a really good time in Sydney,” the partner implicitly refers to the relationship by saying “We had a really good time in Sydney.”

To my knowledge, research that examines the nature and consequences of all four types of relationship awareness together in the same study has not yet been constructed. However, there is research that helps support and shape hypotheses regarding each of the different forms of relationship awareness and their consequences for relationships.

**Figure 7.1** Four forms of relationship awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thinking</th>
<th>Talking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit Metaperspective</td>
<td>Metacommunication</td>
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<tr>
<td>(&quot;We have an affectionate</td>
<td>(&quot;Your tone of voice makes me</td>
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<td>[antagonistic] relationship.&quot;)</td>
<td>uncomfortable [feel safe].&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention to interaction</td>
<td>Relationship talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>patterns</td>
<td>(&quot;I feel good [bad] about the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(&quot;When I come home, he kisses</td>
<td>we get along.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ignores] me.&quot;)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implicit Couple Identity or</td>
<td>Use of First Person Plural</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cognitive Interdependence</td>
<td>and Possessive Pronouns</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Using &quot;being part a couple&quot;</td>
<td>(We, Us, Our/Ours), thus taking</td>
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<tr>
<td>as a lens through which to</td>
<td>a relationship perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>view an activity or situation.)</td>
<td>rather than an individual perspective.</td>
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**EXPLICIT RELATIONSHIP THINKING**

Investigations of explicit relationship thinking are rare. Examining people’s thoughts about their dating relationships, Cate et al. (1995) developed a measure of relationship thinking measure that taps into thought concerning relational constructs, behavioral events, and subjective events and can occur both during
interaction with the partner and when alone. The relationship is the explicit target of thought and is more likely than implicit thought to involve making evaluations of the relationship (Wegner and Guiliano, 1982). Thus, it is not surprising that through factor analysis two categories of relationship thinking reflected thoughts that were construed as potentially enhancing and potentially detrimental to a relationship (ibid.). One category, positive affect, includes such items as “I think about all the fun my partner and I have had together.” An example of a potentially distressing and clearly evaluative item is, “I reflect on whether I am being treated fairly/unfairly in our relationship.”

Cate and colleagues (1995) predicted that relationship thinking would be related to relationship satisfaction. Their measure assesses the extent to which the participant sees oneself as a person who engages in relationship thinking and as such is distinguishable from measures of relationship satisfaction that tap into a global evaluation of one’s feelings about the relationship. As expected, relationship satisfaction related positively to the positive affect category and negatively to the distressful category, even when accounting for the variance contributed by private self-consciousness, interpersonal orientation, and attributional complexity (ibid.).

Envisioning extensions of their research, the investigators deemed it essential to study relationship thinking in married couples. Even though they suspected the processes would be the same for married couples, Cate et al. (1995) surmised that the outcomes of relationship thinking could be different. This idea is consistent with the finding that explicit relationship talk has more of an impact on relationships for those couples who are low in intimacy (Knobloch, Solomon, and Theiss, 2006). That is, perhaps for married couples who, in general, may feel closer as a couple than a dating dyad, thinking explicitly about the relationship may be less important for defining the nature of the relationship.

**EXPLICIT RELATIONSHIP TALKING**

One of the first studies of relationship awareness in marriage demonstrated that talking about the relationship was perceived by spouses differently depending on the situation. In this experimental study, Acitelli (1988) examined the effects of talking explicitly about the relationship on perceptions of spouses’ feelings of contentment. In the study, 42 married couples read stories about couples in which spouses either talk or do not talk about the relationship in pleasant or unpleasant situations. In a short questionnaire following each story, individual spouses rated the fictional spouses’ feelings (of happiness in general and with regard to the specific conversation). Results showed a main effect of relationship talk, such that it was perceived to make both spouses happier with their relationships. Further analyses revealed that the discrepancy between ratings of husbands’ feelings for relationship talk and nonrelational talk was greater in an unpleasant story than in a pleasant story. Hence, relationship talk was perceived as making more of a difference to husbands in unpleasant situations than in pleasant ones. This pattern was not found for ratings of wives’ feelings.
This gender difference may reflect the point that husbands view explicit relationship talk as instrumental (used as a tool for fixing things, so it is especially valuable in a conflict situation), whereas wives are seen to feel equally as good about explicit relationship talk in either setting. These findings highlight the different meanings that relationship talk has for men and women in relationships. These differences in the meaning of relationship talk may also reflect that such talk is initiated by men and women to satisfy different goals (see Chapters 8 and 19 in this volume). Men may see explicit relationship talk as a strategy to help fix or maintain a relationship, so they might question the value of such behaviors during pleasant situations, whereas for women, such talk could be considered routine, something that needs to occur regularly to maintain the relationship (For more detail in distinguishing strategic and routine relationship maintenance behaviors, see Dainton and Stafford, 1993; Duck, 1994).

Moreover, the findings also send the message that context matters. Explicit relationship talk is seen differently depending on whether the conversation is positive or negative. The couples’ level of intimacy is also an important context within which explicit relationship talk has different outcomes (Knobloch, Solomon, and Theiss, 2006). In a study of 120 dating couples (ibid.) investigators observed couples’ conversations and coded them for relationship talk. Couples were asked to rate the impact of these conversations on their relationship. Impact was assessed with seven items asking participants to what extent did they agree, for example that the conversation “was an important event within my relationship” and “changed the way I think about my relationship” (adapted by ibid. from Afifi and Metts, 1998). Results showed that relationship talk was associated with relational impact only with couples who were low in intimacy. For the high-intimacy couples, it was presumed that because they tended to talk about their relationship more frequently, such talk would have less of an impact on the nature of their relationship. For couples low in intimacy, a conversation about the relationship “may be very valuable for understanding the nature of the relationship” (Knobloch, Solomon, and Theiss, 2006).

Research with healthy couples and couples in which one spouse has a chronic illness (Badr and Acitelli, 2005) further corroborates the point that context matters. As expected, the association between explicit relationship talk and dyadic adjustment (Spanier, 1976) was stronger for women than for men, consistent with research on explicit relationship talk in open-ended interviews (Acitelli, 1992). However, the association between relationship talk and dyadic adjustment was stronger for couples (both husbands and wives) with an ill spouse than for couples in which both spouses were healthy (Badr and Acitelli, 2005). Such a finding highlights not only the context in which relationship talk occurs but also the potential usefulness of such talk in the context of chronic illness.

In addition, an area probability sample of 238 married and unmarried couples were asked how often they talked about their relationship in general and in the last two weeks (Acitelli, 2001). Such talk was shown to predict an increase in relationship tension for men approximately 18 months later. Moreover, there was a talk by marital status interaction such that explicit talk at Time 1 predicted a decrease in positive relations (caring, supporting, and accepting one another) for married
men but an increase for unmarried men. The opposite effect occurred for women. Explicit talk at Time 1 predicted an increase in positive relations at Time 2 for married women but a decrease for unmarried women (Acitelli and Carlson, 1997). (For more details on the area probability sample, see Acitelli, 1997).

The interpretation for this complex finding is relatively simple. The literature is consistent in demonstrating that, to men, being in a relationship is more important than an assessment of the internal dynamics of a relationship (e.g., Gove, Hughes, and Style, 1983; Hess and Soldo, 1985). That is, men are more concerned with whether or not the relationship exists, whereas women are more concerned with the emotional quality and internal workings of a relationship. Perhaps, for men, the strategic maintenance of an unmarried relationship through relationship talk is an accepted part of being in the relationship. Over time then, talking about the relationship keeps unmarried men in their relationships and leads to positive outcomes. However, married men may view relationship talk as unnecessary because the relationship is already demonstrably solid and committed, so they may wonder why one would bother talking about it unless its existence is threatened. The fact that relationship talk also predicts relationship tension for men in Time 2 also supports this idea. For married men, then, explicit relationship talk could signal problems in the relationship. Whereas for women, such talk is seen as a routine part of being married. Routine monitoring of current relationship dynamics may be more important to women because of their greater investment, in evolutionary terms, in exclusive long-term heterosexual relationships. Misunderstandings in an intimate relationship incur higher costs for women than for men (see Chapter 6 in this volume).

IMPLICIT RELATIONSHIP TALKING

Scholars recognize that using plural and plural possessive pronouns and their modifiers (i.e., we, us, our, ours) in speech is a way for the speaker to represent himself or herself as part of a couple (e.g., Acitelli, 1993). The use of the pronoun we can indicate closeness, intimacy, or acceptance and can increase the amount of inclusion of the other in a partner's statement (see Mehrabian, 1971). Few studies examine plural pronoun usage in everyday conversation or speech (Knobloch and Solomon, 1993; Simmons, Gordon, and Chambless, 2005). Even fewer examine the associations between plural pronoun usage in speech and relationship quality. In the studies that have examined the link between expressing a couple or “we” perspective in speech and relationship outcomes, the speech is either in oral narrative form (Veroff et al., 1993) or in oral responses to open-ended questions (Williams and Acitelli, 2007).

Veroff and colleagues (Veroff, Douvan, and Hatchett, 1995; Veroff, et al., 1993) asked newlyweds to tell the story of their relationship from first meeting to their plans for the future. Although stories were not coded for frequency of plural pronoun usage per se, stories were coded for a relationship perspective, that is, the extent to which couples were keeping the relationship in awareness implicitly by using the relationship as a lens through which to view their stories. Taking a
relationship perspective in the first year of marriage was significantly related to third-year marital well-being for both husbands and wives. But only for husbands did we find any evidence for the mediation of second-year ease of adjustment to marriage, which includes a lack of marital tension and a sense of equity between spouses (Acitelli, Veroff, and Hassan, 2000).

We suggested that for many men the advantage that implicit relationship awareness has for a couple is not immediately understood (e.g., Acitelli and Young, 1996), but as they adopt it in their cognitive sets they probably become more cognitively coordinated with their wives, tensions are reduced in their relationship, and over time their marriages become happier. When a couple adopts a relationship perspective, it helps men view their relationships and their wives, who take the relationship perspective more for granted, in more positive terms. This interpretation is compatible with research showing that a communal orientation is beneficial to men (Shaver et al., 1996) and with aforementioned research suggesting that relationship talk is valuable to husbands if it is instrumental in solving a problem (Acitelli, 1988). Such is not the case for women, who were seen to value relationship talk equally in pleasant and unpleasant situations and whom we suggest see relationship awareness as a facet of their marital well-being.

In addition, face-to-face interview responses were coded for plural pronoun usage as a form of implicit relationship talk (Williams and Acitelli, 2007). The data for the study were collected in the second wave of a standardized, face-to-face interview in the homes of 136 couples (272 individuals). Married and unmarried couples responded to open-ended questions independently of their partners. When partners were asked to describe their relationship, their use of plural pronouns in their responses was shown to predict relationship satisfaction and commitment uniquely over and above couple identity (the extent to which persons see themselves as part of a couple; Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999) and inclusion of the other in the Self Scale (a measure of closeness; Aron, Aron, and Smollan, 1992). The analyses also controlled for the statistical interdependence of partners within couples. Findings demonstrated that the more couples express their implicit awareness of their relationships in response to open-ended questions, the happier they are in general and with their relationships specifically. Further analyses will be needed to compare both waves of data and to examine gender differences. Overall, it is relatively clear that speaking in terms of “us” or taking a relationship perspective related to good outcomes for a relationship.

**IMPLICIT RELATIONSHIP THINKING**

Much of the work on implicit relationship thinking has been conducted by Linda Acitelli (Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999) and Christopher Agnew (Agnew et al., 1998). Agnew and Etchenberry (2006, p. 282) stated that cognitive interdependence is a “relatively pluralistic, other-inclusive cognitive representation of the self-in-relationship” and falls into the category of thinking implicitly about the relationship. One of their operational measures of the construct is the spontaneous use of plural pronouns in relationship-relevant cognitions, quite similar to Williams
Knowing When To Shut Up

and Acitelli’s (2007) measure of implicit relationship talk previously described. Whether such implicit talk differs in meaning from implicit thought remains to be seen. In any case, implicit relationship thinking leads to positive outcomes for married and unmarried couples. Agnew et al. (1998) demonstrated that cognitive interdependence in romantic couples was related to commitment and that over time the commitment-cognitive interdependence link was bidirectional. That is, over time, the more committed couples were, the more cognitively interdependent they were and vice versa.

Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee (1999) conducted a study in which implicit thought about the relationship, or couple identity, played a crucial role. A couple identity indicates the extent to which a person sees himself or herself as part of a couple and how important being part of a couple is to his or her description of the self. Couple identity is very similar in meaning to the construct cognitive interdependence. The area probability sample (discussed in the explicit talking section of this chapter) of 238 (90 unmarried and 148 married) couples were interviewed in their homes and were asked several questions about themselves and their relationships. The couple identity items were embedded in a list of several descriptors of the self (e.g., hard-working and friendly) and were asked to rate how well each item describes the self and the extent to which the items were important to their description of self. As such, a couple identity could also be considered a self-schema (Markus et al., 1982).

Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee (1999) argued that the degree to which spouses endorsed a couple identity would determine whether engaging in explicit relational thinking (as measured by the Cate et al. [1995] positive affect subscale) is beneficial to one’s relationship. In other words, we wanted to see whether implicit relationship thinking (couple identity) would moderate the relationship between explicit thinking and relationship satisfaction.

For married couples, couple identity moderated the association between positive relationship thinking and satisfaction such that the lower a person’s couple identity the stronger the association between positive relationship thinking and satisfaction. For those high in couple identity, who were already quite happy with their relationships, positive thoughts did not make a difference in their relationship satisfaction. This finding runs parallel to the Knobloch, Solomon, and Theiss (2006) findings that explicit talk about the relationship had less impact on couples already high in intimacy than those couples low in intimacy. The interaction with explicit relationship thinking was not found for unmarried couples. Perhaps positive relationship thinking functions differently for married people than for unmarried dating partners. The cognitive connection between couple identity and relationship satisfaction may be a relatively automatic tendency among those who are married. Having a strong couple identity may foster a positive mindset regarding the relationship, making positive evaluations about the specific relationship chronically accessible (Brewer and Gardiner, 1996; Gardiner, Gabriel, and Hochschild, 2002). For married partners who are high in couple identity, then, conscious positive thoughts about their relationship may not be necessary to be happy with it (Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999).
It is likely that spouses with a strong couple identity are keeping their relationship in implicit awareness—that is, the couple becomes the lens through which they view the world. Wegner and Guiliano (1982) posited that keeping an entity (in this case, the relationship) in tacit awareness helps maintain a positive view of the entity (relationship). That is, identifying with the relationship helps to maintain a positive view of relationship. This identification is similar to the process described by Aron et al. (1991) as including the other in the self. However, in this case, the “other” is the couple, or the couple’s relationship. As Smith and Henry (1996) postulated, inclusion of a group [relationship] as part of the self explains cooperative patterns of behavior that benefit the group [relationship] at the expense of the individual. What begins as the spouse including the valued partner in the self eventually evolves into seeing the valued partner as part of us. In other words, one identifies with the couple or views the world through the lens of the relationship. For those low in couple identity, thinking about their relationship in positive terms does make a difference in their satisfaction because it gives them the stimulus they need to feel satisfied with the relationship (Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999).

Longitudinal analyses revealed a similar pattern of results but were significant for women only. Concurrently, then, even though women generally scored higher than men on measures of couple identity, these identities work in the same fashion for men and women, providing a good explanation for the oft reported sex differences in relationship cognition. That is, the gender differences we see are more likely due to differences in self-concepts rather than biological sex (Acitelli, Rogers, and Knee, 1999; Garrido and Acitelli, 1999). However, the longitudinal effects are not so easily explained except that perhaps women’s couple identities comprise more superordinate schema and thus have more salience to their lives in general.

Due to what appear to be couple identity’s beneficial effects on intimate relationships, recent work has begun to examine couple identity as an implicit coping mechanism for couples in stressful circumstances such as the chronic illness of one partner. A goal of one such study (Badr, Acitelli, and Carmack, 2007) was to discover whether seeing oneself as part of a couple and incorporating one’s relationship into one’s self-concept (couple identity) alleviates the negative effects of stressors on caregiver mental health. The caregiver stress proliferation model (Pearlin et al., 1990) posits that in addition to the stress of physical work of giving care, the illness situation can lead to other more “intrapsychic strains” for the caregiver, such as loss of self and feeling trapped (ibid.). These stressors can lead to poor mental health among caregivers.

In our study of the role of couple identity in the caregiving situation (Badr, Acitelli, and Carmack, 2007), the sample consisted of 92 healthy spouses who had been a caregiver for a husband or wife with a chronic physical illness for an average of 5.9 years. Results showed that couple identity partially mediated the link between negative stressors (relational deprivation, overload, loss of self, and captivity) and poor mental health. Couple identity fully mediated the effects of positive stressors (i.e., caregiver self-esteem and competence) on caregiver mental health. These findings lend support to the idea that viewing the relationship as an extension of oneself, or high levels of couple identity, may help to minimize the
negative effects and to maximize the positive effects of the caregiving experience on mental health.

**FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

Clearly, the context in which relationship awareness occurs makes a difference with regard to its effects. However, thus far, research on all forms of relationship awareness has been focused solely on intimate heterosexual relationships. Preliminary work has begun to examine relationship awareness in friendships and shows that people report thinking and talking about their relationships less in friendships than in their intimate relationships (Rabhan and Acitelli, 2007). What we do not know is how the nature of such thinking and talking differs according to relationship type. Even if the frequency of relationship talk is different between types of relationships, it is not clear whether the triggers and outcomes of relationship awareness in other types of relationships are similar to those in intimate relationships.

More exploration into gender differences in relationship cognition might shed light on how men and women think differently about relationships and themselves (Acitelli and Young, 1996). There is a considerable body of literature showing that men and women differ in the degree to which they see themselves as interdependent (Cross and Madson, 1997; see also Chapter 10 in this volume). In addition, Martin (1991) showed that when women think about relationships, their thoughts are more elaborate and complex than when men think about relationships. What needs to be made clearer is whether the category “relationship” is just larger or a more superordinate schema in general for women than men.

Scott, Fuhrman, and Wyer (1991) suggested that memory structures for relationships may differ between the sexes. They indicated that a woman’s memory “bin” for relationships is larger, such that conversations with spouses would more likely be stored as a relationship memory, whereas men are more likely to store the memory of the conversation in the bin of the topic discussed. If the memories of men and women are structured differently in this manner, it helps to explain why women are more likely to see relationship implications in conversations in which men are focusing on the topic only. Such thinking could lead to miscommunication between partners regarding the nature of the relationship itself.

A question that remains unanswered is whether, for women’s cognitive structures, relationship as schema holds a more superordinate position than it does for men. Or is it that relationship schema and self-schema are so interwoven for women that events occurring in the relationship take on just as much significance as events important to the self? In other words, we know that the size and hierarchical position of a category or schema in one’s mental network are important in encoding and retaining information as meaningful. What needs to be understood is whether the size or position of a category is as important as its interconnections with the self and other schema related to the self that make the frequency and outcomes of relationship awareness differ for men and women. One aim of this chapter is to encourage future research in these directions.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The review in this chapter has demonstrated that the correlates and outcomes of relationship awareness may depend on context, gender, and the form the awareness takes (explicit or implicit; thinking or talking). Several research studies demonstrate that women think and talk explicitly about relationships more than men do. However, the mean differences are not very large or interesting. What is more meaningful is that such thinking and talking seems to affect men and women in relationships in different ways and may reflect different goals in relationships. It is almost impossible to examine relationship awareness without being forced to admit that gender plays a key role in its outcomes.

For women, talking explicitly about the relationship seems to function as merely routine maintenance and is seen as positive for the relationship. For men, on the other hand, explicit talking about the relationship can have beneficial effects only if it is instrumental in solving problem. As such, explicit relationship talk is associated with negative circumstances for men, whether it is prompted by a negative situation or leads to his feelings of marital tension. Thus, men see relationship talk as a means to an end, whereas women may see it as an end in itself or something to be valued for its own sake, with positive consequences for relationship satisfaction.

Research also indicates that couples’ implicit relationship awareness (either thinking or talking) is associated with positive relationship outcomes and predicts an increase in marital happiness over time. Although there is still the typical gender difference in the means of implicit awareness, this difference does not have the same meaning as it does for explicit awareness. Implicit awareness seems to be beneficial for both members of dating relationships, married couples, and the caregivers of ill spouses, male and female alike. In other words, taking a relationship perspective in thought and speech is generally good for the relationship, but explicitly addressing the relationship in conversation does not guarantee a good outcome. Although such talk may give women good feelings, it has the potential to make a man’s boots squeak.

REFERENCES


Understanding Relational Focus of Attention May Help Us Understand Relational Phenomena

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INTRODUCTION

Assuming close relationship partners—friends, romantic partners, and family members—care about one another's welfare and wish their partners to care for their own welfare, people certainly do behave in baffling ways at times. In the face of partner needs, some people reduce rather than increase the support they provide (Campbell et al., 2001; Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan, 1992) and increase rather than reduce their own anger (Rholes, Simpson, and Orina, 1999). Some people respond to their partner's negative moods not with care but with feelings of (unjustified) self-rejection (Bellavia and Murray, 2003; Murray et al., 2003) and hurtful behavior just when a partner most needs support (Murray et al., 2003). When faced with information that their partner sees a problem in the relationship, some people do not address the problem but, instead, derogate and pull away from that partner (Murray et al., 2002). People have been shown to support friends less than strangers at times (Tesser and Smith, 1980) and to feel bad when a close friend performs well (Tesser, 1988; Tesser and Collins, 1988; Tesser, Millar, and Moore, 1988). Sometimes when one member of a close relationship commits a faux pas or encounters difficulty, that person's close partner not only fails to provide support but also distances himself or herself from the partner (Tesser, 1988).

Relationship researchers, noting such strange behavior, have generally explained it on the basis of people's desires to protect the self. People attack those in negative moods (and perhaps ready to reject them) to protect themselves (Murray et al., 2003). Better to reject than be rejected. If a partner behaves in an embarrassing fashion, better to distance oneself from that partner lest the behavior reflects negatively on the self. If a close partner might outperform you on a task, better not to help the partner as later comparisons with the partner may hurt and so forth.

Such self-protective explanations do go a long way in explaining why people may fail to support partners and instead behave in ways that hurt their relationships. However, appealing to self-protection as an explanation for such behaviors leaves important questions open. First, most of the observed destructive behaviors are just protective in the moment. They often carry big costs to the person and to the relationship in the long run, with partners distancing themselves from and disliking the person and relationships ending. Second, there are often immediate negative consequences for the person. Partners sometimes immediately retaliate, and people may experience immediate guilt. Third, these behaviors often harm a partner about whom the actor really does care. Don't actors see these costs? Don't they see that the costs typically outweigh the benefits of the self-protective behaviors? The self-protective explanations fail to explain why people often just miss what is patently obvious to their partners and to third-party observers.

The answer to failing to see one's own destructiveness and to suppress it lies, we think, in understanding how goals in relationships drive patterns of focus of attention in relationships. We do not disagree with other relationship researchers that low trust or low self-esteem leads some people to be self-protective and to engage in destructive behavior. We, however, wish to emphasize something else that accompanies low trust and having self-protective goals in relationships. It
is that the presence (or absence) of chronic self-protective goals in relationships drives patterns of what we call relational focus of attention in those relationships.

Understanding differences in relational patterning of attention between people will, we think, help to understand not only why people who are insecure or have low self-esteem and overly strong self-protective motives behave in destructive ways in their relationships but also why they simply do not take into account partner needs or likely partner reactions to their behavior when they behave in self-protective ways. It’s not that information about those needs is not available in the situation or that people do not care about their partners. Instead, we believe, the self-protective impulses carry with them a strong, and often protracted, attentional focus on the self and, importantly (patterning our term after one used in studies of visual attention) “attentional blindness” to partner needs and to partner likely reactions to their behavior (cf. Most et al., 2005; Simmons and Chabris, 1999). Such blindness falls out of self-protective motivation and is, we believe, as much a determinant of harmful relationship behaviors (in the sense that attentional blindness stops such people from inhibiting these behaviors) as the initial self-protective urges themselves. Understanding such blindness is likely, we further believe, to give rise to productive lines of relationship research, and we outline two such lines of research to which considering such attentional blindness has given rise in our own laboratories.

WHAT TYPES OF RELATIONAL FOCI OF ATTENTION EXIST?

Relational focus of attention refers to where people focus their attention when interacting with those with whom they have relationships. It is driven by what one’s goal is at the time. Two such foci of attention come easily to mind: One’s focus of attention could be on oneself and the implications of one’s partner for the self, or it could be on one’s partner and on the implications of one’s own behavior for the partner. However, at least two more possibilities exist. A third possible relational focus of attention may occur when with one’s partner and one’s own focus of attention is not on self or partner but rather on a joint activity. For instance, if one is skillfully ballroom dancing with one’s partner, one’s focus of attention could be on the nature of the dance itself. Yet another possible focus of attention when interacting with one’s partner might be on a third party’s perspective on the self and the partner as a pair. For instance, when dancing, a couple could focus upon how others in the room are viewing their skill at dancing.

As already noted, we believe people’s active goals drive where their focus of attention lies. Thus, in figuring out styles of relational focus, it makes sense to start with these goals. In analyzing what is ideal in terms of patterns of relational focus of attention in close, mutual, communal relationships we start with what people’s goals, ideally, are in these relationships.

Most people agree on what goals should characterize communal relationships. First, each member should have a goal of supporting his or her partner’s welfare.
Second, because communal relationships such as friendships, romantic relationships, and many family relationships are mutual, each member also should have goals of seeking support when he or she needs such support (Clark, Graham, and Grote, 2002; Grote and Clark, 1998). When one member has instrumental needs, concrete help should be given (e.g., help in moving into an office). When a member needs encouragement and support as he or she strives toward goals important to him or to her (e.g., excelling in an athletic contest that he or she has deems important), encouragement should be given. When opportunities arise in which a partner could be included in a mutually enjoyable activity, the partner should be included (e.g., including the partner in a group dinner). Finally, when opportunities for symbolic support arise, such support should be forthcoming (e.g., sending a friend flowers on a special occasion). Importantly, when no specific, pressing needs exist, members of communal relationships may support one another by pursuing mutual, enjoyable activities or engaging in mutually beneficial tasks. Thus, a third goal may be the successful pursuit of and engagement in such activities.

This suggests that in healthy communal relationships one should see a mix of focusing on one’s partner’s needs, focusing on one’s own needs, and focusing on activities while awareness of self and partner fades to the background. Importantly, relational goals and relational focus of attention should flexibly and easily shift as a person tracks internal and external cues of his or her own needs, the partner’s needs, and, in the absence of clear-cut needs, opportunities to benefit the self or another’s welfare or to engage or continue to engage in mutually beneficial activities. Occasionally, but far more rarely, we suspect focusing on how a third party views one’s relationship may be beneficial to members of the relationship. For instance, it might be helpful when one is dancing and the third party is the judge for a dance contest or when one is bringing one’s romantic partner home for the first time and wishes the family to view the relationship positively. Maximizing the positivity of that third party’s judgments of self and partner as a pair is the goal in such a circumstance.

RELATIONAL FOCUS IN HEALTHY COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relational Self-Focus

Relational self-focus involves a person thinking about his or her own needs and welfare as they relate or might relate to the partner. It can include the person thinking about his or her own needs and whether a partner will care of those needs, or will fail to do so or even cause harm. It might also include a consideration of whether seeking support might interfere with a partner’s own needs. A relational self-focus of attention in relationships occurs anytime a person is explicitly thinking about him or herself and his or her well-being as it relates to a partner. The partner may not be present but often will be. It can include positive, comforting thoughts (e.g., “I’m nervous; I’ll ask him for help, and I know he’ll come through for me”) as well
as negative, distressing thoughts (e.g., “I’m embarrassed to be seen with her”). In a healthy communal relationship, relationship self-focus should be high when one has a need or desire that the partner can help to fulfill. Relational self-focus in such situations should facilitate turning to the other for assistance when the other is capable of providing it and when turning to the partner for support won’t unduly interfere with the partner’s own welfare. (The latter circumstance, in healthy relationships, may cause a shift to relational partner focus.)

**Relational Partner Focus**

Relational partner focus refers to a person’s thinking about his or her partner, including thinking about promoting the partner’s welfare or for preventing harm to the partner. As with relational self-focus, relational partner focus can be positive in content. One might, for instance, be thinking, “Her solo performance is wonderful. I’ll take her out afterward to celebrate.” It can have negative content as well: “She’s being very selfish. That’s going to hurt her chances of being able to continue working with these people. Maybe I should tell her that.” It may also involve both some positive and some negative thoughts: “She really needs my help on that. I’d like to help, but she’ll get mad if I offer.” In healthy communal relationships, relational partner focus should be driven by a goal of supporting the partner’s welfare. In other words, when an opportunity to support the partner arises, one should focus on the partner in an effort to support that partner. A number of studies (Clark, Mills, and Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Mills, and Powell, 1986; Clark et al., 1987) have demonstrated that such relational partner focus ordinarily does occur when a person desires a communal relationship with a partner and that partner has a need.

**Relational Activity Focus**

Importantly, when interacting with a relationship partner, one need not be focused on either the self or the partner. It is not only possible, but often the case, that two people focus on the activity in which they jointly are engaged including the interactive outcome of own and partner contributions to the activity. For example, partners may be dancing with one another, and the individuals may focus on the

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* There is, of course, an extant literature on self-consciousness and self-awareness. People can be more or less aware of their internal attitudes, values, and emotions (private self-consciousness) and more or less aware of how others are viewing them (public self-consciousness) (Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss, 1975). Relational self-focus, however, is a relationship concept. It refers to thinking about the self and the implications of the other for the self within the relationship. Considering its links with private self-consciousness first, the concept of self-focus in a relationship might include being aware of one’s attitudes and values as they relate to the relationship and the relationship partner and the implications of the partner for the self. It would not, however, include, say, simply reflecting on one’s own personal attitudes. Relationship self-focus also may relate to public self-conscious as it would include being aware of what one’s partner is thinking about the self but it would not include being generally aware of how strangers would view the self when one goes out into the world. That people who desire communal relationships track not only their needs but also their partners’ attention to those needs has been demonstrated (Clark, Dubash, and Mills, 1998).
dance itself, the movement, the rhythm, the music, and the coordinated steps. When people’s self-awareness of their own needs and of their partner’s needs fade into the background and attention is on joint activities, we would say that people in relationships may enter a relational activity focus. Ideally such activity focus occurs frequently, and, when the activity is going well, members will experience what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described as “flow” or a pleasant sense of being absorbed in the activity and making progress toward a goal—in this case a relational “flow.”

Seeing One’s Relationship from a Third Party’s Perspective

When partners feel comfortable with one another and have high self-esteem, we suspect they rarely worry about how others see them. However, there are some circumstances under which they might do so either for the benefit of the relationship itself or for the benefit of a third person about whom one or both relationship members care. As noted earlier, it may assist a couple engaging in a dance contest if they consider how the judges are viewing their performance and take that into account. This may allow them to adjust their behavior in such a manner as to increase their chances of winning. A new example, however, is needed to illustrate how a couple may directly benefit a third party for whom they care (and perhaps indirectly benefit themselves) by taking a third-party perspective on their relationship. Imagine that a married couple is engaged in a disagreement. They might be comfortable in so doing but if both care for their young child who is present and they may take his perspective. Upon taking his perspective, they may realize the child is distressed by the conflict and they may cease it, thereby furthering their shared goals of bringing up a psychologically health child and having a happy family life.

The Ideal Patterning of Relational Foci of Attention

Ideally, as already noted one’s relational focus of attention within a close, communal relationship should be flexible, shifting easily as needs arise and are resolved, as opportunities for individual and joint activities arise, and as third-party needs and desires need to be taken into account. When one’s partner has a need, one’s relational focus of attention should be on that partner and on what one can do to support that partner. When one has a need oneself, one’s relational focus of attention should be on the self, on whether one’s partner is close by and can provide help, and on how one might seek support. When neither partner has a clear need but mutually enjoyable activities might take place, focus of attention might be initially be on including the other in such activities, but, once engaged, attention should shift to the activity itself. If a third party has a need, that party’s perspective should be taken into account if members care about that parties needs. In general, cues of needs on either person’s part (and occasionally on a third party’s part) or the absence of such cues should shift goals and, with them, relational focus of attention.

This all suggests that, ideally, one’s relational focus of attention should shift in a state-like manner depending upon the relational circumstances. People should not have traits of being predominantly relationally self-focused, other focused, or of always focusing on activities or what third parties may think. Close, communal,
relationships themselves also should not be constantly characterized as ones in which each member has a particular relational focus of attention that is stable and, perhaps, distinct from that of the other member’s consistent and particular relational focus of attention. (In contrast, stable individual differences in focus of attention may well exist and “work” in relationships in which legitimate power differences exist [cf. Depret and Fiske, 1993; Fiske, 1993] or in asymmetrical communal relationships such as that between a parent and a very young child in which one member has high needs and an inability to either meet them him or herself [an infant, in this case] as well as an inability to intentionally meet the partners’ [parents, in this case] needs.)

WHAT CAN GO WRONG?

A flexible focus of attention in communal relationships is ideal in theory and, we think, in practice. However, not everyone pull it off in their relationships.

We are born social creatures. We are innately geared, we believe, to form communal relationships (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). We start off life helpless and dependent upon caretakers, and the natural course of things is for our caretaker to be focused on our needs and to meet those needs. This allows us to start life being (appropriately) relationally self-focused, thinking of our own needs as intimately tied to those of our caretaker who can support us and also as relationally activity focused in times of our own joint exploration of the world with our caretaker, although early on we may often “check back” with caretakers to assure ourselves this is okay.

Of course, gradually over development we lose helplessness and gain the ability to care for others. As we do so we take on goals of supporting others as well, and optimally we should come to shift our focus to them in times they need support (Clark, 1984; Clark and Jordan, 2002). The tendency to shift attention to a partner’s needs as we note signs of those needs may also be built into our nature (Hoffman, 2000), and human attributes such as a tendency to mimic others or to become distressed when others are distressed may underpin our ability to shift focus and to become relationally partner focused in the face of partner needs or opportunities to support our partners.

However, as both developmental and social psychologists have pointed out, all may not go well. If people are insufficiently cared for early on they may become insecure. Some individuals may learn not to rely on others and may become avoidant, and others may become anxious about others’ care, constantly seeking it even when it is not necessary. It is such insecurities, attachment theorists have emphasized, that lead to tendencies to self-protect by either learning to become fiercely independent or constantly seeking others’ affection.

Along with these insecurities and tendencies to self-protect, we emphasize, likely comes a failure, at least to some extent, to develop new relational foci of attention and flexibility of foci of attention (or, if insecurities develop later in life, losses in flexibility of relational foci of attention). Loss of optimal attentional flexibility
(or its failure to develop in the first place), we propose, becomes replaced with one of several possible rigid and nonoptimal chronic relational foci of attention.

**Chronic and Rigid Relational Self-Focus**

Whereas some relational self-focus (in the face of objectively consensual need for support) is good for communal relationships, too much is bad. We suggest that when people fear social rejection or lack of acceptance, they often tend toward chronic relational self-focus even in the absence of their having objective needs. Along with this focus, we suggest, comes a blindness to the other’s perspective and, importantly, to the other’s needs as well as how the person’s own actions will influence the partner (until after such influence has taken place and the person becomes aware of the implications for the self). The goal of self-protection drives this chronic relational self-focus as well as the attendant attentional blindness to the other’s perspective and to the cues to the other’s needs. This chronic presence of a goal of self-protection effectively prevents the ability to shift attention to the partner when doing so is needed. Soon after self-protective negative behaviors that may irritate or harm the partner take place (and the person’s temporary goal has been achieved), however, the ongoing goal of self-protection allows the person to “see” the harm caused not because the person is now focused on the partner’s welfare but because a partner’s actual or imagined reactions to the poor behavior are now relevant to the ever present goal of self-protection.

Such chronic relational self-focus appears to be common and associated with such traits as low self-esteem, low communal orientation, high rejection sensitivity, and high avoidance. Those traits have long been associated with evidence of self-protection. Here what we are adding is the point that they are also associated with chronic relational self-focus and, unintentionally, blindness to information relevant to partners’ welfare.

Notably, and very importantly, the chronic and rigid relational self focus to which we refer here is likely to be more like a personal trait of an individual embedded in a relationship than the state relational self-focus previously discussed. As it is embedded in relationships, it will likely influence the nature of the relationship as well.

The nature of healthy relational self-focus as a state versus unhealthy relational self-focus as a trait and the consequences for the person who is so focused, the partner and the relationship will differ. Healthy relational self-focus results from a person having a temporary need or desire. It should promote self-disclosure and support seeking in times of needs or to promote movement toward personal goals, and it ought not preclude care for the other as it is not chronic and should dissipate as objective need is satisfied. Unhealthy relational self-focus results from chronic insecurity, low trust in partners’ caring for the self, and a felt need to self-protect. It may lead to seeking care or support when partners do not believe it is necessary, and the concomitant attentional blindness to partner welfare may result in resentment from partners that their own needs are not being met and frustration and anger on partners’ parts.
Chronic and Rigid Relational Other Focus

The relationship literature suggests that insecurity and self-protective tendencies do not come in just one flavor. Some people, when faced with a lack of care, adopt an avoidant style in their relationships. These people would seem to be likely to adopt the chronic relational self-focus style previously suggested. But not all people who are insecure in their relationships completely “give up” on the ideal of communal relationships and possibility that partners will care. Among those who are insecure and self-protective but who have not given up on the possibility that others may care, the extant literature suggests that a different chronic relational focus sometimes results—a chronic and rigid relational partner focus of attention.

Put another way, people may, in the service of self-protection, adopt a goal of trying to maintain their communal relationships by constantly trying to please or to care for partners. They become relationally partner focused, and their goal to please others may make them attentionally blind to their own needs. This pattern is ironic, as the distal cause is to protect the self. Anxiously attached people are likely overrepresented in this category, as they may have negative working models of themselves yet positive models of partners. These also are likely the same people whom Helgeson (1994) and Fritz and Helgeson (1998) identified as having the trait of unmitigated communion or, in other words, the tendency to care for partner’s needs to the exclusion of one’s own needs. Helgeson noted that these people tend to be females, and it seems to us that it might, indeed, be the case that anxiety about acceptance might be particularly likely to lead to chronic and rigid relational partner focus among women given societal norms for women to be nurturant. The blindness to one’s own needs that likely accompanies rigid relational partner focus may account for the tendency Helgeson (2003) noted for those characterized by unmitigated communion to neglect their own health.

The nature of healthy relational partner focus as a state versus unhealthy relational for the partner focus as a trait and the consequences for the person who is so focused (as well as the partner and the relationship) will differ. Healthy state-like relational partner focus is driven by a goal to promote the partner’s welfare, and it should contribute to success in reaching that goal and to enhancing partner welfare and relationship success. Unhealthy trait-like relational partner focus is driven by a proximal goal of supporting or pleasing the partner, which, in turn, is driven by a more distal goal of self-protection. Unhealthy relational partner focus may carry with it the costs of people not expressing their own needs (and feeling resentful that they are not cared for given all the care they give the partner). It may also result in partners feel smothered and controlled and them feeling that nonexistent “needs” on their part are being “met,” with attendant negative consequences for the relationship.

Chronic and Rigid Relational Activity Focus

Logically, it seems to us, a person who has given up on a communal ideal for relationships but one who retains a need for affiliation, joint task performance (e.g., raising children), and joint mutual activity (e.g., sexuality) might drop goals related
to mutual caring but might retain activity goals. Such a person's relational focus of attention might be chronically on activity. Often this may be on individual activity (as may characterize people known as workaholics), but sometimes attentional focus may be chronically on relational activity. People may, for instance, focus almost exclusively on mutually enjoyable relational activities (e.g., sex) while dropping the flexibility of relational attentional focus necessary to seek needs for the self or to be responsive to the relationship partner.

Some Dysfunctional Aspects of Seeing One's Relationship from a Third Party's Viewpoint

A strong and chronic self-protective stance also may lead to an unhealthy tendency to frequently view one's relationship from a third party's perspective. As a result, a person who chronically takes such a perspective may often distance himself or herself from a partner to avoid embarrassment just when a partner needs the most help (e.g., when a partner has been fired). Partners likely will react negatively to such distancing—feeling hurt and abandoned. So too, may people who self-protectively and chronically take a third parties' perspectives on the relationship be especially prone to drawing close to the partner when a partner succeeds, becomes famous, or is beautiful in order to bask in the partner's glory. Whereas partners may sometimes enjoy this, it may also put undue pressure on those partners to be “perfect,” thereby creating stress for the partners and the relationship itself. A person whose partner often takes a third-party perspective on the relationships may always feel like he or she is stage and valued (or devalued) by the person based only on how he or she reflects upon that person. Our reasoning here fits well with earlier writings by Tesser (Tesser and Cornell, 1991) in which he noted that low self-esteem individuals (who should have the most chronic self-protection goals) are also those whose self-evaluations are most dependent upon “reflection” processes.

WHAT CAN ATTENDING TO RELATIONAL FOCUS OF ATTENTION BUY US?

We believe that explicitly attending to patterning of relational foci of attention (flexible foci of attention, chronic relational self-focus, chronic relational other focus, chronic relational activity focus, or chronic focus on third-party perspectives) carries with it two types of payoffs: It will help to (1) explain puzzles in the extant literature; and (2) generate new hypotheses and theory relevant to understanding both dysfunctional and functional processes in relationships.

Explaining Puzzles in the Relationship Literature

This chapter began by noting some destructive relationships behaviors in which people sometimes engage. In the face of partner needs, some people reduce support and increase anger and hurtful behavior. Moreover, when faced with information
that their partner sees a problem in the relationship, some people fail to address the problem and, instead, derogate and pull away from that partner. At times people support friends less than strangers when they fear friends may outperform them at a task relevant to their identity; they feel bad when a close friend performs well if they will look bad by comparison, and they distance from partners under such circumstances. We noted that such behaviors can be explained by taking into account the fact that people who do not trust partners may have particularly strong and chronic inclinations to self-protect. However, explanations based on self-protection failed to explain the striking short-sightedness of these people’s self-protective strategies. They “protect” in the moment only to face both immediate guilt and retribution from partners and harm in the long term from having neglected or hurt partners. If, however, one assumes that a chronic self-protective goal leads to a chronic, unhealthy, relational self-focus that, in turn, produces attentional blindness to partner needs, these puzzling behaviors are explained easily. When threatened in any way, we suspect they don’t even see partner needs in the moment. That is why, we think, they do not take likely partner reactions into account and suppress destructive behaviors before they emit self-protective behaviors that ultimately harm not only the partner but the self and the relationship as well.

**Identifying a Destructive Relationship Phenomenon**

Taking forms of relational focus of attention and their consequences into account can also lead to new lines of research on dysfunctional behavior in relationships. For example, Graham and Clark (2006) observed that some people see their partners as “all good” at times and “all bad” at other times. This odd behavior, we thought, might be explained by low self-esteem persons having a chronic need to self-protect and consequently a chronic relational self-focus, which might lead them to store positive and negative information about close partners in functionally separate memory stores.

Specifically, we (Graham and Clark, 2006) speculated that, in times of low social threat, people low in self-esteem might focus solely on potential or existing partners’ good traits, idealizing those partners so as to facilitate their own feelings of safety in approaching such partners. Due to their self-focus and goal of approach, they would likely be “blind” to partner weaknesses or flaws that might threaten approach. In times of high social threat, in contrast, these same people might self-defensively switch to focusing on all negative behaviors, now being blind to partner positives, resulting in a second, functionally separate, store of all negative partner traits. People high in self-esteem, in contrast, having a healthier and more flexible relational focus of attention, would be able to see their partners more accurately as having both negative and positive attributes that were sometimes related to one another. Those attributes would be stored in a functionally integrated manner.

This reasoning led to a series of experimental and correlational studies that lent strong support to these ideas. People low in self-esteem were slowed in an experimental task that required them to make alternating positive and negative judgments about relationship partners relative to a task that allowed them to make all
positive then all negative judgments; people high in self-esteem were not. (These effects did not occur when people made judgments of an inanimate object—their computer.) People low in self-esteem were more likely to report that they did see partners as perfect some times and as awful at others and that they switched between those views, whereas people high in self-esteem were less likely to do so. People low in self-esteem were found to be more likely to switch views of partners in response to social threat primes than were people high in self-esteem (Graham and Clark, 2006, 2007; Geula, 2007; Wortman, 2004). The “Jekyll and Hyde-ing” of relationship partners we and our students observed in this work is likely quite dysfunctional for relationships, and knowledge of this phenomenon has straightforward clinical implications. Whereas we never directly measured relational focus of attention in these studies, our conceptualization of how relationship focus of attention works was the driving force behind the work.

**Identifying a Constructive Relationship Process**

Relational focus of attention also ought to help us identify and investigate relationship phenomena that are adaptive and helpful. For example, Williams and Clark (2007) recently considered the possibility that flexibility of relational focus of attention might carry with it the experience of having especially benevolent views of the self when the situation calls for attending to oneself and especially benevolent views of one’s partner when the situation calls for attending to one’s partner.

We (Williams and Clark, 2007) began to test this idea in a fairly straightforward initial study. To start we developed a measure to tap appropriate, healthy, flexibility in focus of attention. Our measure consisted of statements directly asking people how flexibly they could move their own relational focus of attention around to attend to the self, to a partner, or to concentrate on joint act (and away from wherever their focus of attention had been. (For instance, to tap ability to move relational focus from self or activity to partner when attention to the partner’s well-being is important, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed with this sentence: “When someone I know has a success it’s hard for me to focus just on that person and be happy for them.” This item was reverse scored.)

In the process of developing this scale we found that, as expected on the basis of our theoretical ideas, higher flexibility scores were associated with lower levels of avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and higher self-esteem.

Next we administered the scale to a group of 188 people (about two thirds female; one third male) and asked them to complete a modified version of the classic Ross and Sicoly (1979) task in which individuals who live together report on the percentage of household tasks they perform. (Typically individuals’ reports of the percentage of a variety of tasks they perform, when taken together, add up to more than 100% suggesting that individuals have biases in their favor.) Our variant of the procedure asked the question about household work two ways. We asked either what proportion of the household tasks the participant performed (providing a situational cue for them to think about themselves) or what proportion of the household tasks their partner performed (providing a situational cue to think about their partner).
What happened? Overall people did show a bias to report having done more than 50% of the work replicating Ross and Sicoly (1979). What’s important for the present chapter, though, is that the expected interaction between individual differences in scores on our flexibility of relational focus of attention and situational cues to think about self or partner emerged. Specifically, individuals who were high in flexibility of relational foci of attention were both more self-serving in the cue-the-self (by asking about own contributions) condition and less self-serving in the cue-the-partner (by asking about partner contributions) reference condition than were participants low in flexibility of relational foci of attention. In other words, high flexibility was associated with more benevolence (or self-serving tendencies) in views of one’s own contributions when situational cues dictated focus on the self and with greater benevolence (or partner servicing tendencies) in views of the one’s partner’s contributions when situational cues dictated focus on the partner. Another way of putting this is that, for people with highly flexible relational foci of attention, benevolence of views moved with those cues.

We suspect this sort of movement will prove to be quite beneficial for relationships because we suspect the most potent cues to shifting relational focus of attention in healthy, well functioning, secure communal relationships are cues relevant to own and partner needs or opportunities to benefit self or partner. If relational focus of attention (and benevolence of views of self and partner) can shift flexibly according to who has a need or desire at the time, more responsiveness to one’s own needs may be sought when needed, and more responsiveness to partners’ needs may be given when needed across time in the relationship. Although our ideas about the adaptiveness of flexible relational focus of attention in close relationships remain somewhat speculative at this point (because we did not actually examine responsiveness to needs) we hope our findings still illustrate the potential usefulness of the concept of relational focus of attention in generating new ideas for research on adaptive, positive, relationship processes.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We have presented a discussion of types and patterns of relational foci of attention. Starting with the premise that goals drive one’s focus of attention and that most people’s goals for their communal relationships are to provide mutual support and engage in mutually enjoyable and beneficial joint activities, we have suggested that optimal relational focus of attention is flexible and driven by the appearance of needs on each relationship member’s part and by opportunities for mutually enjoyable and productive joint activities.

However, whereas we do believe most people hold a communal norm as an ideal we do not believe all people are adept at following it nor adept at switching focus within communal relationships in ways most useful for maintaining the success of those relationships. For people who do not trust others to consistently care for their needs, we believe a goal of self-protection can override ideal patterns of mutual noncontingent responsiveness in relationships such as friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationships. Along with a chronic goal of self-protection
can come inflexibility in relational focus of attention and inattention to partner (or sometimes one’s own) needs. A common pattern in which self-protection can result is a constant, unhealthy, relational self-focus resulting in a neglect of partner needs. Another possible pattern arising from a chronic need for self-protection may be a constant, unhealthy, relational partner focus that may take the form of attending to a partner’s needs to the neglect of the self or of constantly trying to please the partner in an effort to ensure he or she will like and stick by you. People with chronic self-protection needs may also fail to show either self or partner relational focus, choosing instead to bury themselves in individual activities (as a workaholic might) or to have a chronic relational activity focus (as a person solely concerned with sexual activities when it comes to a relationship might). We believe paying attention to the sorts of relational foci of attention to which a chronic need (or lack thereof) to self-protect will give rise to new ideas about both dysfunctional and functional relationship processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Preparation of this chapter was supported by a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant (Margaret S. Clark, P.I.) and by a National Research Service Award (NRSA) predoctoral grant to Edward Lemay. Some of the research described within the chapter was supported by an NRSA predoctoral grant to Steven M. Graham and the aforementioned NSF grant. The opinions expressed in this chapter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the NSF or of the National Institutes of Health. We acknowledge the work of Berit Nowicki, who developed some aspects of the existence of relational activity focus as a part of her senior honors thesis completed at Carnegie Mellon University under the direction of Clark.

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Committed to What?

Using the Bases of Relational Commitment Model to Understand Continuity and Change in Social Relationships

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INTRODUCTION

Past research on commitment processes in close relationships has tended to adopt a dichotomous view of relationship persistence, yoked to the type of relationship under consideration. A relationship is either on or off, together or broken up. We argue against such a view, reasoning that close relationships are more suitably characterized by frequent changes in type of relations between dyad members. Little is known about how relationships may morph from one type to another, such as from a steady romantic relationship to a friendship (or vice versa). This chapter considers how people contemplate relationships with alternative others as well as alternative forms of a relationship with a current relationship partner. We focus our discussion on the concept of need fulfillment, noting how needs might be filled by different partners or by different forms of a relationship with a given person. Using the Bases of Relational Commitment Model, a new model that extends the well-known and validated Investment Model, we articulate a theoretical framework that identifies how thoughts about other forms of a relationship with a partner might help account for relative commitment to the current type of relationship experienced by dyad members. We close by describing some methodological challenges to conceptualizing relationships as dynamic and subject to change.

NEED FULFILLMENT AND RELATIONSHIP TYPES

Close interpersonal relationships fulfill particular ongoing needs held by individuals. However, not all needs may be fulfilled by the same person at any given time, and the needs a particular person fills may change over time, thus changing the type of relationship one has with that person.

A number of interpersonal needs have been identified by theorists over the years (e.g., Baumeister and Leary, 1995; Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992; Prager and Buhrmester, 1998), including needs such as for security, sex, intimacy, identity, self-actualization, companionship, friendship, inclusion, and self-expansion. Although not exhaustive, these needs provide some sense of the kinds of needs that people seek to fulfill via interpersonal interactions with others. There has not been a great deal of empirical work to hammer out an exhaustive list of need types or, more generally, on need fulfillment, but extant research has demonstrated associations between need fulfillment and emotional reactions within ongoing premarital romantic involvements (Le and Agnew, 2001) as well as between need fulfillment and relationship stability (Drigotas and Rusbult, 1992).
Lay people (as well as relationship scientists) have developed and commonly use shorthand terms to refer to others who routinely fulfill interpersonal needs. Relationship type terms such as friend, boyfriend, best friend, lover, spouse, and partner have at their base the notion that the person for whom the label applies is fulfilling particular relational needs. Some needs may be filled by more than one person (e.g., one may have multiple friends who collectively fulfill one’s companionship needs). Other needs tend to be filled by only one person, often due to historical, societal, or normative constraints (e.g., generally only one person at a given time fulfills one’s sexual needs). Of course, a given person may fulfill multiple needs at any given time. For example, Girlfriend Y may be seen as fulfilling one’s security, sexual, and companionship needs. We see the concept of relationship type as best characterized by bundles of different kinds of need fulfillment between people.

Over time, the extent, type, and source of need fulfillment may morph, often in concert. The extent to which a person is perceived as satisfactorily fulfilling various needs can change. For example, Girlfriend Y may have at one point been seen by Boyfriend Q as a satisfactory sexual partner as well as a great companion, but, upon Q becoming acquainted with alternative sexual partner K, his view of Y may shift such that Y is now seen more as a source of fulfilling companionship needs and less as a source of fulfilling sexual needs. In this example, the relationship between Y and Q can be seen as shifting from one type (featuring the satisfaction of multiple needs) to another (featuring the satisfaction of one need). The relationship does not end; it changes (Rollie and Duck, 2006). Q might now refer to K as “girlfriend” and to Y as “close friend.” In this way, the source of one’s need fulfillment has changed. It might be said that Q and Y experienced a “breakup,” yet the term breakup, as discussed herein, does not adequately or accurately describe the dynamic change from one type of close relationship to another between these people.

The satisfaction one derives from one kind of need fulfillment with a specific partner can also pull one away from pursuing a relationship type characterized by different need fulfillment possibilities with that person. For example, it may be the case that one values the companionship of a partner to such an extent that the possibility of pursuing a romantic relationship as well with that person is not actively considered or is quickly dismissed. That is, the satisfaction perceived to be obtainable from another type of relationship with the same partner may be quite low. Thus, as we describe in the following section, the evaluations and comparison of satisfaction to be gained across relationship type possibilities are an important consideration in determining relational continuity. Needs can often best be fulfilled by pursuing different relational options.

**Relationship Dissolution or Relationship Evolution?**

Although acknowledging exceptions, we have come to believe that relationships are more likely to evolve than to completely dissolve. Such evolutions reflect changes in the needs fulfilled by a given relationship. It may be the case that one’s needs
are no longer filled by a given person and better filled by another person, or it may be that the types of needs filled by a given person have shifted.

With respect to the dynamic nature of romantic relationships, in a recent longitudinal study of commitment processes, we uncovered two particularly curious findings in data obtained from romantically involved individuals (Agnew, Arriaga, and Goodfriend, 2006). First, at Time 2 of the study (about six months after Time 1), among those participants who reported that they were “no longer still in a romantic involvement with their [Time 1] partner,” 39% indicated that they had engaged in sexual intercourse with that partner since the reported “breakup.” Second, following the “breakup,” very few reported having no relationship whatsoever with the former partner (only 8%) whereas the majority reported some relationship, though of a different type (e.g., 8% best friends, 12% close friends, 28% friends, 44% acquaintances). These findings have led us to question to what extent a “breakup” actually occurred, and, more generally, what is meant by “breakup.”

“Breakup” is often considered a key dependent variable in close relationship research and is used to validate a number of relationship process variables. It is particularly prized among social psychological researchers given that it is considered behavioral in nature, in contrast to the multiplicity of psychological variables often investigated. Faced with such findings, however, we view the concept of relationship breakup as (1) unclear, (2) a misnomer not reflective of dynamic reality, and (3) not consistent with the notion that dyadic relationships have a life course, or trajectory, that can survive shifts in need fulfillment over time.

The trajectory of a relationship—whether it is well functioning or in distress—is closely aligned with how committed each partner feels to continuing the current state of the relationship. As such, examining shifts in relationships led us to also question what is meant by “relationship commitment” at any given moment in a relationship. In our own research on commitment processes within romantic relationships (e.g., Agnew et al., 1998; Arriaga et al., 2006; Lehmiller and Agnew, in press), when we ask a person whether or not they are committed to their relationship with their current romantic partner, we are asking (at least implicitly) whether they intend to continue to have a romantic relationship with that person. By “romantic,” we assume the relationship entails at least some degree of physical intimacy, though the definition of romantic relationship is left open to the respondent (and, despite working with thousands of respondents over the years, we have never once had someone ask us what it means). If that person later reports that they have “broken up” with their romantic partner, we assume that means that the physical intimacy is now over. As to whether the person wanted this change in relational outcomes, that is another question entirely. Although romantic involvement is an interdependent venture, one partner can effectively “call the shots” with respect to shifting the nature of the relationship (see Agnew, 1999, 2000). However, findings such as those previously cited (with 39% of those reporting “breaking up” with their partner also reporting sexual relations with that person since the “breakup”) clearly call our assumptions into question.

After physical intimacy has ceased within a relationship, a number of paths are available to the former intimate partners. They can continue to have a relationship
with one another, even a close one, but one that no longer features physical intimacy. Or they can have no relationship whatsoever, completely “moving on,” with no future contact between once physically intimate partners. What determines the future relational path taken? What determines shifts in relationship type preferences? These questions lie at the heart of our current focus. We know of no models that provide a conceptual understanding of shifts that people make between relationship types. Herein we offer such a model.

WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR SHIFTS PEOPLE MAKE BETWEEN RELATIONSHIP TYPES?

Although there is a great deal of existing research on relationship cognitions and their influence on relationship processes (e.g., see Chapters 6, 7, and 8 in this volume), extant models of relationship commitment are mute with respect to movement between relationship types with the same partner. In fact, measures of relationship commitment rarely specify what it is that a respondent is committed to. Take, for example, an item measuring commitment level in the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew, 1998): “I am committed to my partner.” Committed to what? To the well-being of the partner? To the well-being of the relationship with the partner? And to what type of relationship with the partner? The current type of relationship or any type of relationship? The target of commitment is unclear. Certainly the relatively vague item phrasing follows the popular and equally vague vernacular used to describe relationship connections. However, we believe the lack of precision also masks key relational processes. As a result, we know little about the life course of a relationship as it unfolds between two people over time. We agree with Masuda’s (2006, p. 113) recent observation regarding what she referred to as postdissolution relationships: “Relationship researchers still cannot sufficiently explain why some people voluntarily maintain relational interactions with their former romantic partners.”

We contend that the factors that determine whether a particular type of relationship is continued are also instructive in determining whether any type of relationship is continued with a person. Thus, we start by describing the Investment Model of Commitment and use it, and extensions to it, as a building block to articulate a new model of both relationship continuity and change.

THE INVESTMENT MODEL OF RELATIONSHIP COMMITMENT

Based in part on notions from Interdependence Theory (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978; Kelley et al., 2003; Rusbult, Arriaga, and Agnew, 2001; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), the Investment Model was developed by Rusbult (1980a,b) to explicate factors underlying individual-level commitment toward any specific type of relationship
The Investment Model posits that three independent factors influence level of commitment to a relationship. The first two factors, satisfaction level and quality of alternatives, are derived from the Interdependence Theory concepts of satisfaction and dependence for describing the state of a relationship. Rusbult proposed that satisfaction level and quality of alternatives each are important predictors of commitment. The third factor, investment size, was offered by Rusbult (1980a) to take into account the influence of sunk costs on relational decision making. We provide a brief summary of the Investment Model’s three predictors of commitment and review some recently suggested additions to the model as a backdrop for our discussion of a new model, which accounts for relationship continuity as well as relationship changes.

In the Investment Model, satisfaction level refers to the evaluations of outcomes obtained in the course of interaction with a particular relational partner, relative to the outcomes one expects to attain in comparable relationships of a similar type (referred to as one’s comparison level, or CL; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959). To the extent that interactions yield favorable outcomes relative to expectations, an individual will be satisfied with the relationship. Although Interdependence Theory does not prescribe particular weights to be assigned to outcomes that comprise the CL, it is reasonable to assume that particular interactions with particular people have disproportionate weight within the CL (e.g., interactions with one’s primary attachment figure may weigh heavily in judging future interpersonal interactions; see Chapters 4, 5, and 11 in this volume).

The second component of the Investment Model is quality of alternatives, which refers to an assessment of the outcomes that one believes would be attained in the next best available relationship of a similar type. Thus, it is a rating of expected satisfaction in an alternative relationship. The main interdependence notion here is that an individual’s dependence on a given partner for outcomes is a function of the distance between the outcomes one attains with a given partner versus what one would attain in the next best possible relationship of the same type; the greater the distance between these two derived outcomes, the greater the dependence (and hence, commitment) to the current relationship partner. Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998) included having no relationship (being alone) or spending time with friends as alternatives that would have the effect of lowering commitment to a current romantic relationship. Later we expand further the concept of relationship alternatives in accounting for shifts in preferred relationship type between two people. We emphasize that the concept of alternatives in the Investment Model is essentially an evaluation of perceived satisfaction, albeit with respect to a different relational target.

Finally, the Investment Model includes the concept of investments, defined as “the magnitude and importance of the resources that are attached to a relationship—resources that would decline in value or be lost if the relationship were to end” (Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew, 1998, p. 359). Investments can be viewed as one type of barrier to ending a relationship; if the relationship were dissolved, partners would lose all the investments they had “sunk” into their partner and their
relationship. The more a person puts into a relationship over time, the more one risks losing should the relationship end, thus inhibiting relationship dissolution.

BEYOND SATISFACTION, ALTERNATIVES, AND INVESTMENT: PLANS AND SUBJECTIVE NORMS

The Investment Model provides a compelling and empirically validated theoretical framework through which to understand general commitment processes. Recent meta-analytic work concludes that (1) each of the three specified predictors accounts for unique variation in commitment level, and (2) the three predictors collectively account for more than 60% of the variance in commitment (Le and Agnew, 2003). Moreover, evidence has been obtained attesting to the Model’s applicability in understanding both interpersonal and non-interpersonal targets of commitment (Agnew et al., 2007; Le and Agnew, 2003). It has also proven to be a robust predictor of relationship stability (e.g., Bui, Peplau, and Hill, 1996; Le and Agnew, 2003). However, recent research suggests that additional variation in relationship commitment, as well as additional conceptual understanding, can be accounted for by adding other elements to the Model’s specified predictors.

Future Plans for a Relationship

Recently, Goodfriend and Agnew (2007) argued for a reconceptualization of the investment concept. Previous theorizing and research on the Investment Model has viewed investments as resources that have already become linked to the relationship. This is not surprising considering the economic roots of the investment concept (Becker, 1960) and the manner in which investments are generally defined. However, the general definition of investments offered by Rusbult (1980a) notes that investments include anything that might be lost if the relationship were to end. It seems reasonable to suggest that this includes not only things that have already been invested but also any plans that partners have made, either individually or with the partner, regarding the relationship. For example, if an individual has made plans with his or her partner to have children or to buy a beach house together in the coming years, these future plans would be lost if the relationship were to end now. The potential loss of future planned investments might influence an individual’s decision to remain in a relationship, beyond the loss of resources already invested. Thus, Goodfriend and Agnew (2007) suggest that possible future plans are considered when assessing what might be lost upon relationship termination.

As such, investments may be conceptualized as varying along a temporal dimension that includes past as well as planned investments. In the extant literature, all investments have been past in nature. However, planned investments also undeniably exist—investments that a person consciously intends to put into his or her relationship in the future. Although planned investments have not yet come to fruition, if the relationship were to end, these plans would be lost, in addition to any
past investments. Faced with such a loss, it is easy to envision a person with many plans for his or her relationship thinking twice before ending an involvement.

Recent developments in the psychology of goals as well as past findings in the attitudes literature highlight the importance of considering future possibilities in current decision making and behavior. For example, Gollwitzer’s (1999) and Gollwitzer and Sheeran’s (2006) concept of implementation intentions emphasizes the theoretical and empirical advantages of elaborated plans that one develops to see one’s goals to fruition. Generally speaking, the more elaborated the plan, the more likely is goal completion. Furthermore, publicly stated plans may serve to fuel interpersonal commitments in a manner similar to publicly stated attitudes (Kiesler, 1971). Just as making a public commitment toward a position is likely to strengthen one’s advocacy of that position, so too might a couple’s firm and elaborated future plans function to increase their level of relationship commitment.

Future plans can be conceptualized in different ways. Oettingen and Mayer (2002) explored two forms of thinking about the future: expectations versus fantasies. Expectations about the future involve judging an event’s likelihood of occurring and therefore motivate one toward action. In contrast, fantasies are simply positive, embellished future desired events and therefore are “not a solid basis for acting” (p. 1199). Planned investments align with expectations about the future—“I will do this in the future with my relationship partner”—and, thus, higher levels of planned investments should motivate partners toward actions that will lead to the success and continuity of the relationship. Empirical findings to date indicate that having more plans significantly predicts not only levels of concurrent relationship commitment but also continuation of that relationship over time (Goodfriend and Agnew, 2007). We view the notion of future plans as an important extension of the investment concept.

Subjective Norms Regarding a Relationship

In addition to considering how plans might influence relationship commitment, research has also examined how others outside of the dyad may impact intradyadic decision making and relations. Research has examined the associations between perceptions of a social network’s approval or disapproval for a romantic relationship and characteristics of that relationship (Agnew, Loving, and Drigotas, 2001; Arriaga, Goodfriend, and Lohmann, 2004; Bryant and Conger, 1999; Cox et al., 1997; Lehmiller and Agnew, 2006, 2007; Loving, 2006; Parks, Stan, and Eggert, 1983; Sprecher, 1988; Sprecher and Felmlee, 1992). In general, past studies have shown that qualities, structure, and opinions of a social network are associated with the quality and functioning of dyadic relationships embedded in that network.

The concept of subjective norms has recently been shown to account for variation in commitment level above and beyond satisfaction, alternatives, and investments (Etcheverry and Agnew, 2004). Taken from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), subjective norms in the relational realm refer to what one believes that important social referents (e.g., one’s family, friends, church) think one should do with respect to a relationship, weighted by one’s motivation to comply with those specific referents. With respect
to relationships, motivation to comply refers to a general tendency to yield to the perceived wishes or opinions of the source of normative beliefs. If motivation to comply with a social referent is high, that person should have a greater influence upon behavior in a relationship than when motivation to comply with that person is low.

Subjective norms are theorized to influence behavior via their effect on intentions to perform a behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and numerous others have found behavioral intentions to be one of the best predictors of actual performance of a behavior (cf. Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Relationship commitment is a particularly apt focus for the application of subjective norms as commitment has been found consistently to be associated with relationship cognition and behavior (see Agnew et al., 1998). Moreover, commitment itself is held to include “intention to persist” in the relationship, which is akin to a behavioral intention (Arriaga and Agnew, 2001). Thus, the application of the subjective norms construct to the prediction of intent to persist in a relationship is particularly appropriate.

Research by Etcheverry and Agnew (2004) applied the subjective norms concept to the realm of premarital romantic relationships. They found that this variable provided additional prediction of relationship commitment, above and beyond the powerful effects of satisfaction, alternatives, and past investments. Just as behavioral intention mediates the effect of subjective norms on behavior in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), longitudinal analyses indicated that commitment mediated the effect of subjective norms on remaining in a romance approximately eight months later. Both theoretically and empirically, the subjective norms construct appears to account for an element of commitment that is not captured by the three predictors within the Investment Model. Thus, we see it as a useful addition to the model.

THE BASES OF RELATIONAL COMMITMENT MODEL

To account for continuity in relations of a particular type between two people as well as possible changes in type of relationship, we offer the Bases of Relational Commitment (BORC) Model (Figure 9.1). As in the Investment Model, we suggest that satisfaction level is considered with respect to outcomes obtained in a relationship as it is currently defined (e.g., a romantic partnership). That is, as one evaluates outcomes in a current relationship, one evaluates them against a standard for a specific type of relationship (a specific CL), as described in Interdependence Theory. However, we focus particularly on need fulfillment as critical outcomes. Extending the Investment Model notion of alternatives, perceptions of satisfaction to be derived in alternative relationships is considered with respect not only to other partners for a given type of relationship but also to pursuing a range of alternative relational options, including the pursuit of other relationship types with the current partner. Investments (past and planned) are held to guide the decision to continue in a relationship of any type with a given partner. Finally, subjective norms are considered with respect to the type of relationship that one perceives as
most supported by significant others outside the relationship. We elaborate on the BORC Model in the following section.

**Obtained and Alternative Satisfaction Levels**

In determining commitment to a particular type of relationship, satisfaction is considered with respect to (1) outcomes obtained in the relationship as it is currently defined, (2) outcomes perceived as obtainable from an alternative partner for the same relationship type, and (3) outcomes perceived as obtainable in an alternative relationship type with the same (current) partner. Both obtained and alternative satisfaction evaluations have the concept of need fulfillment at their core.

**Evaluation of Current Outcomes Relevant to Need Fulfillment** Satisfaction level is considered with respect to outcomes obtained in the relationship as it is currently defined. Obtained outcomes are judged with respect to the extent that they are perceived as fulfilling particular interpersonal needs, measured against one’s CL for the fulfillment of those needs. If the level of satisfaction derived from a particular type of relationship with a partner is perceived as high, then that relationship type is likely to persist. If low, continued pursuit of that relationship type is unlikely.

Of course, the fulfillment of particular needs may be deemed more important by an individual than the fulfillment of other needs. For example, a person might have particularly high affiliation needs and see great values in the cultivation and maintenance of friendships. Another person may be less social and more
sexual in their interpersonal tendencies, seeking to gratify sexual needs in the absence of companionship. In this way, individual differences may be seen as influencing obtained and perceived satisfaction with a given relational partner (see Kelley, 1983).

Evaluations of Alternative Partners and Types Although currently obtained satisfaction is an evaluation with respect to what one is receiving in a given type of relationship, there are also two additional and distinct alternative satisfaction judgments that can be made that may impact commitment to a relationship type. Alternatives may be considered with respect to other partners for that type of relationship but also with respect to alternative relationship types with the current partner. The perceived quality of alternative partners has traditionally been viewed as the primary draw away from a current partner (see Chapter 19 in this volume). However, if an alternative type of relationship is perceived as compelling, it may also serve to draw a person away from their original relationship type assuming the two types are not simultaneously desired.

First, as in the Investment Model, we consider alternatives external to the existing dyad. One assesses the anticipated satisfaction obtainable from an alternative person who might fulfill the same needs fulfilled by the current relational partner. If the satisfaction foreseen as obtainable from an alternative partner is greater than that currently obtained by one’s partner, commitment to continuing a relationship (of the type offered by the alternative) with the current partner will be reduced.

Second, we consider alternatives internal to the existing dyad. That is, in the BORC Model, anticipated satisfaction is considered with respect to alternative relationship types with a given person. Note that, consistent with Interdependence Theory, a CL is held to exist for various relational domains (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978). People have separate expectations for outcomes obtained in relations with friends, lovers, fishing partners, financial advisors, etc. Just as one evaluates the outcomes attained in a given relationship versus the generalized expectations one holds for outcomes in that type of relationship (i.e., against the CL for that domain), we suggest that one also judges the satisfaction expected to be gained in pursuing (or not pursuing) alternative relationship types with the same partner. Thus, one may consider the expected satisfaction derived with respect to the fulfillment of different needs by a relational partner and, by extension, with respect to different relationship types filled by that person.

We argue that individuals regularly gauge the relative fulfillment of a variety of relational needs by a given person. If one type of relationship provides greater satisfaction than another, the individual will be more likely to pursue the particularly satisfactory type. In this way, commitment toward one type of relationship with a person may vary as a function of commitment toward another type of relationship with that person.

It is also the case, of course, that interactions with a particular partner can simultaneously yield highly positive levels of satisfaction with respect to the fulfillment of multiple needs. For example, Husband C may fulfill several needs at a highly satisfactory level. In this instance, commitment to a romantic relationship
with C as well as to a close friendship with him would not be in conflict, and both would continue simultaneously.

Central to the commitment-promoting power of obtained and alternative satisfaction evaluations is the notion that a person has only so much time in daily life to pursue social interactions. Thus, as a person cannot do everything with everyone, time must be allocated between various social targets. We believe that a reasonable basis on which time allocation decisions are made (and, thus, by which relationship commitments emerge) is according to perceived need satisfaction.

**Valued Linkages**

Investments (past and planned) are also theorized to influence one’s commitment to a relationship of any type with a given partner (e.g., romantic or friendship). However, given that the term *investments* is traditionally limited to describing past actions as well as the term’s prominent use in the name of Rusbult’s (1980a) model, we offer a new term to refer to those treasured elements that serve to keep people committed: *valued linkages*. Valued linkages are subjectively treasured connections to a given relational partner, in the form of past investments or future plans, that one does not wish to lose but that one would perceive to have lost if the relationship were to end.

In the BORC Model, valued linkages are not just considered with respect to those that have formed within the current relationship type. Rather, they may be considered across the domain of experienced and envisioned relationship types. We see the presence of valued linkages as particularly important in determining whether any type of relationship is pursued with a person over time.

**Past Investments** As in the Investment Model, the investments that one has made over the course of time with a person strengthen one’s commitment to a relationship with that person. The investment may be intrinsic or extrinsic, tangible or intangible (Goodfriend and Agnew, 2007; Rusbult, 1980a). We contend that the investments need not be accrued during the course of interactions relevant to the current relationship type. Rather, all investments accrued, in whatever relational context, serve as relational “glue.” For example, if a person has invested a great deal with Person D over the years as a close friend and companion prior to a sexual relationship, all of these investments would influence the decision of whether or not to continue a relationship of some type with D. Without such accrued investments, it is less likely that strong commitment to a relationship will form. Moreover, we believe that, without such linkages, there is a greater possibility of shifting from some type of relationship to no relationship at all.

**Future Plans** In ending a relationship, one loses not only those investments that have been sunken to date but also the possibility of achieving any future plans with the partner. Thus, the plans that one forms with a partner act to keep one’s commitment to the partnership alive. In the BORC Model, future plans combine with past investments to strengthen commitment to continuing a relationship of some type with a given person.
One notable aspect of considering future plans as contributing to commitment is that such plans do not require that relationship partners have much of a shared history together. That is, even partners who have known one another for a relatively short period of time may become quite committed to continuing their relationship, not because of considerable past sunk costs but because of a motivation to see cherished future plans come to fruition. We argue that the motivation to continue a relationship in order to fulfill cherished goals can be powerful, consistent with findings from the literature on the robust effects of approach-avoidance motives (see Chapter 13 in this volume). In addition, we see relationship commitment as particularly fueled by future plans given that individuals often predict that the future will bring particularly positive affective outcomes (Wilson and Gilbert, 2003). Desiring good things to happen in the future can have a potent influence on what one does at the current time.

**Subjective Norms**

Subjective norms are considered not with respect to what one perceives that significant others want one to do concerning a current relationship but with respect to the type of relationship that one perceives as most supported by significant others. One can easily imagine a situation in which a person wants to pursue a romantic relationship with a particular person but in which that desire is opposed by other important people in the person’s life, who favor a different relational type (for recent research on social marginalization processes that may hinder commitment and stability of a romantic involvement, see Lehmiller and Agnew, 2006, 2007). For example, parents may not be opposed to a friendship between their daughter and a neighborhood boy but may be vehemently opposed to a romantic relationship between the two. To the extent that important social referents successfully communicate their views to a relationship participant, commitment to the preferred relationship type would be expected to increase and commitment to the nonpreferred types to decrease.

Of course, one may know what others want one to do but not be motivated to comply with those wishes. Thus, the concept of motivation to comply serves as a useful theoretical (and empirical) weight in determining whether or not perceived normative beliefs will, in fact, influence commitment level. As in the Theory of Reasoned Action, we see perceived normative beliefs as having little influence on behavior unless one is motivated to comply with their source. Thus, for example, although one may be aware of one’s parents’ unfavorable view of a particular romantic partner; this perception should only have impact insofar as one cares about what one’s parents think. If one does not care, the perception of parental disapproval should have little or no impact on one’s feelings of commitment.

**Summary of BORC Model Predictions**

To summarize, with respect to understanding commitment to a particular type of ongoing relationship with a particular person, the BORC Model predicts that commitment will be highest when (1) obtained satisfaction in the current type of
relationship is high, (2) perceived satisfaction for relations with others (i.e., with a different partner for the same relationship type, with one’s friends), with the current relationship partner in a different type of relationship, and with being alone are low, (3) past investments with the person are high, (4) future plans with the person are high, and (5) subjective norms are supportive of continuing in the current type of relationship. By considering these elements, the BORC Model can also be used to understand shifts between commitment to one type of relationship and commitment to another type with the same person, as well as decisions to pursue no type of relationship at all.

**METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF CONSIDERING RELATIONSHIP CHANGES**

In considering close relationships as subject to change in type, a number of methodological challenges become salient. Chief among these challenges are the necessity of obtaining data over time and the need to be specific with respect to administered measures. We now consider each of these challenges briefly.

**Necessity of Longitudinal Data**

Relationships between two people have a life course. They begin in one way or another (Sprecher, Wenzel, and Harvey, in press), are maintained over time (Canary and Dainton, 2003), and at various points may change into something quite different than originally began or envisioned (Fine and Harvey, 2006). Tracking the life course of a relationship between two people requires multiple measurements over significant periods of time. Given that relationships unfold and morph over time, longitudinal data are essential. Not only are multiple assessments required to track relational continuities and changes, but the timing of any consequential relational changes may also not be captured on a given measurement occasion. Sudden events can occur that fundamentally shift one’s view of a partner and the subsequent course of a relationship (Surra and Hughes, 1997). Moreover, events can lead one not to want to pursue any further involvement with a person (e.g., a perceived betrayal). The variables included in the BORC Model can track such temporal changes, but only to the extent that they are captured as they unfold over time.

**Importance of Measurement Specificity**

Given the various needs that may be fulfilled in a relationship and, thus, the types of relationships that may exist between two people, it stands to reason that attempts to measure commitment processes should be as specific and precise as possible with respect to the target of commitment. Consistent with Ajzen and Fishbein’s (1977) principle of correspondence (later referred to as the principle of compatibility by Ajzen, 1988), behavioral prediction with respect to the stability or
continuation of a particular type of relationship would be appreciably enhanced by using measures that are specific with respect to type of relationship. For example, if one wishes to assess satisfaction with the romantic relationship between Person A and B, one must ensure that the measures used are specific to romantic relationship need fulfillment and not general measures of relationship satisfaction. One might also consider including measures that assess the relative importance of different interpersonal needs for a given individual and allow for those importance ratings to change over time. As specified in the BORC Model, it is also important to assess perceptions regarding alternative relationship types with a given person, as such perceptions may influence one's commitment to the current type of relationship. Unfortunately, with added measurement specificity come added measurement length and increased burden on study participants. However, we see the value added to our understanding of dynamic commitment processes as worth these challenges.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Relationships between people can change. We know surprisingly little about how relationships morph from one type to another. In this chapter, we consider how people contemplate relationships with alternative others as well as alternative forms of a relationship with a current partner in accounting for relational commitment of a particular type with a particular person. We have focused our discussion on the concept of need fulfillment, noting how interpersonal needs might be filled by different people or by different forms of a relationship with a given person. Standing on the shoulders of giants, we extend concepts from Interdependence Theory, the Investment Model, and the Theory of Reasoned Action to help account for both continuity and change in relationship commitments. The Bases of Relational Commitment Model provides the variables necessary to account for commitment to a given type of involvement by assessing obtained and alternative satisfaction levels, valued linkages, and subjective norms regarding a relationship. Initial tests of the BORC Model have yielded supportive findings, with each of the model’s specified variables accounting for unique variance in relationship type commitment and the overall model accounting for more than three quarters of the variance in commitment (Agnew, Arriaga, and Wilson, 2007). We look forward to further tests of the model and encourage its use in understanding continuity and changes in social relationships.

REFERENCES


Motivational and Affective Processes in Relationships
Despite the centrality of intrapersonal processes of social cognition and affect, social psychology is ultimately the study of the connections between people. Even social cognition has become more interpersonal in recent years as topics such as shared cognition, transactional memory, and distributed cognition have become fruitful areas of social psychological research.

Apart from shared cognition, two large bodies of research literature in social psychology deal directly with the interconnectedness between and among
individuals. One (represented by the chapters in this volume) is the study of close relationships, personalized bonds between individuals and members of small groups such as family, teams, and peer friendship groups. The other is the study of social identity, the more depersonalized bonds among individuals who share membership in large social groups or categories, such as organizations, nations, or ethnic and religious identity. Together these two areas of research account for the lion’s share of articles published in the Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes (IRGP) section of the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, as well as in specialty journals devoted to those topics specifically. Yet, despite the fact that both close relationships and group membership underscore the fundamentally social nature of human beings, there is very little connection among research in these two domains. Close relationship researchers rarely cite or refer to social identity or embeddedness in social groups, and social identity theorists draw a sharp distinction between intergroup and interpersonal processes, relegating the latter to “personal” rather than “social” identity (cf. Hogg, 2001).

A few years ago, Wendi Gardner and I tried to juxtapose the literatures on close relationships and social identity by postulating that relational ties and group identities constitute two different levels of the “social self” (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). In place of existing dichotomies that contrasted individual–independent versus interpersonal–interdependent self-construals (Cross and Madsen, 1997; Markus and Kitayama, 1991) on the one hand or personal versus social–group identities (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Turner et al., 1987) on the other, we proposed a tripartite model, distinguishing among individual, relational, and collective self-representations. Further, we suggested that these are not simply three aspects of a single self-system but rather three separate systems with different identity properties, locus of agency, and motivational concerns (see also Sedikides and Brewer, 2001).

The relational and collective levels of self postulated by Brewer and Gardner (1996) represent two different forms of social identification—that is, processes by which the individual self is extended to include others as integral to the self-concept. One defining distinction between these two social selves is that the relational self is personalized, incorporating dyadic relationships between the self and particular close others and the networks of interpersonal connections via the extension of these dyadic relationships. By contrast, the collective self involves depersonalized relationships with others by virtue of common membership in a symbolic group. Collective identities do not require interpersonal knowledge or interaction but rely on shared symbols and cognitive representations of the group as a unit independent of personal relationships within the group (Etzioni, 1968; Turner et al., 1987). This distinction between groups based on communal relationships is similar (though not identical) to other conceptualizations of different types of social organization, including the distinction between communities versus associations (Toennies, 1955), mechanical versus organic solidarity (Durkheim, 1933), and common-bond versus common-identity groups (Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale, 1994).

Although the tripartite representation of the self has gained some recognition (e.g., Kashima and Hardie, 2000; Kashima et al., 2004; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001), the consequence has been to further isolate the study of close relationships
and group identity. After all, if these are two separate and potentially independent forms of social bonding, then there is no need to study either in the context of the other. Little is known about the mutual influence that the relational and collective selves have on each other. In the present chapter I hope to correct this balkanization by exploring the parallels between close relationships and social identities and then considering how they interact as regulatory systems.

**TWO TYPES OF BELONGING**

In contrast to the distinctions drawn by Brewer and Gardner (1996), close relationships and inclusion in groups are considered essentially interchangeable forms of social connecting in the literature on belonging (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) and social exclusion (Williams, Forgas, and von Hippel, 2005). For example, in their comprehensive review of research related to the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary focus primarily on the need for close, caring interpersonal relationships. Nonetheless, at several points in the review they refer to group identification and inclusion in large social groups as further instantiations of belonging and need fulfillment. Similarly, Williams’s (2001) review of social ostracism uses the same terms to refer to interpersonal exclusion (e.g., the silent treatment) (see Chapter 18 in this volume) and ejection from social groups (e.g., excommunication or banishment).

Personally, I would prefer to reserve the concept of belonging for inclusion in large social groups and would use a different term, such as bonding, to refer to close personal relationships. At minimum, it should be recognized that these represent two different forms of belonging that should not be treated interchangeably. I would argue on evolutionary grounds that formation of close personal bonds and inclusion in relatively large social groups serve different adaptive functions for humans as a social species (cf. Caporael, 1997). Personal ties (with mutual caring and concern) provide for a wide range of reciprocal benefits. Among the primary benefits to each individual in such relationships is that (1) they are personalized; (2) relationship partners are not interchangeable, but benefits are tailored to the needs of the specific person; and (3) relationship partners are privileged over others when there are multiple demands for scarce resources. But this very feature of close relationships places limits on the number of such bonds an individual can draw on. The size of one’s circle of family and friends is inherently small. Ethological studies suggest that the limit on the number of an individual’s close personal ties is 15, and even extended networks of interpersonal connections are in the order of 150 (Dunbar, 1993, in press). Thus, close relationships provide for a certain form of security but cannot provide for an extended range of resource sharing, cannot protect the individual from major environmental disasters or marauding groups, and cannot meet needs for depersonalized cooperation and aid (Brewer, 1981). One of the major achievements of human evolution as a social species is the capacity for connection to others through shared symbolic group identities. I argue that social identities at this collective level are distinct from social identities forged in the context of close personal relationships.
Attachment Styles: Interpersonal versus Group

The parallels between interpersonal and group-based forms of belonging are nicely illustrated by recent extensions of the principles of attachment theory (see Chapters 4 and 5 in this volume) to the group level. In a program of three studies, Smith, Murphy, and Coats (1999) validated a new measure of group attachment styles (attachment anxiety and avoidance), modeled after the Romantic Partner Attachment scale (Collins and Read, 1990) developed to assess adult attachment styles in close interpersonal relationships. The group attachment scales proved to have good reliability and predictive and construct validity with respect to group membership behavior and emotions and also proved to be distinct from scores on the relationship attachment measure at the interpersonal level. The correlation between attachment anxiety for specific group memberships correlated only .46 with interpersonal attachment anxiety, and similarly, group avoidance correlated only .33 with the interpersonal measure of attachment avoidance. Further, the group attachment measures uniquely predicted affect and behavioral engagement with ingroups. Thus, it is possible for an individual to be securely attached to their group memberships yet be anxious or avoidant with respect to interpersonal attachment and vice versa.

Chapter 4 in this volume discusses the idea of groups as attachment figures and the relationship between global interpersonal attachment style and group-specific attachment. Citing research by Rom and Mikulincer (2003), the authors conclude that the presence of high cohesiveness or solidarity among group members can attenuate effects of individual-level attachment anxiety on group performance and effectiveness. Cohesion, however, is defined in terms of the quality of interpersonal relationships and interactions within the group. In the context of relatively small, interacting work groups, it is not surprising that each group member’s personal attachment style and expectations about interpersonal relationships would play a role, in addition to the quality of experiences with other group members, in determining group-specific attachment.1 However, the security derived from inclusion in large, symbolic depersonalized groups may have very different antecedents. Although there is no direct research on predictors of attachment to collectives, it is very likely that group characteristics such as size, stability, and boundedness have more to do with secure attachment than interpersonal processes within the group. If that is the case, then chronic attachment styles in the interpersonal domain may not be correlated at all with individual differences in attachment orientation toward large collective groups.

Loneliness: Relational Connectedness versus Collective Connectedness

A similar distinction between interpersonal and group-based belonging emerged from a large-scale study of the measurement of loneliness (Hawkley, Browne, and Cacioppo, 2005). Factor analysis of responses to the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA) Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona, 1980) from more than 2,500 college students identified three distinct (though correlated) factors,
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The first factor, labeled Isolation, consisted of items referring to general dissatisfaction with social connectedness at the personal level (e.g., “I feel isolated from others”; “I am unhappy being so withdrawn”). The second factor, labeled Relational Connectedness, consisted of items dealing with feelings of familiarity, closeness, and support from others (e.g., “There are people I can turn to”; “There are people I feel close to”). The third factor, Collective Connectedness, consisted of items referring to feelings of group identification and inclusion (e.g., “I have a lot in common with the people around me”; “I feel part of a group of friends”). Although all of these factors could be subsumed under a general construct of Loneliness at a second-order factor level, the factor structure supported the conclusion that self-perceptions of loneliness-connectedness “originate from three highly related but distinct aspects of the social domain” (Hawkley, Browne, and Cacioppo, 2005, p. 801). Further, this factor structure generalized across males and females and replicated in a diverse sample of older adults.

The results from these measurement studies of attachment and loneliness suggest that individuals are capable of distinguishing between social connectedness that derives from close interpersonal ties with specific others and connectedness that derives from inclusion in larger social groups. Further, satisfaction or security in one of these domains does not necessarily assure satisfaction in the other. Secure attachment and connection at both levels of the social self appear to be necessary for both mental and physical health (Cacioppo, Hawkley, and Berntson, 2003).

Gender Differences in Connectedness

Although relational and collective aspects of social connectedness are evident for both males and females, a number of studies have revealed gender differences in the relative salience of these two forms of social identity. Cross and Madson (1997) argued that there is a fundamental difference between men and women in independence versus interdependence, with women generally higher in interdependent self-construal and greater concern for close interpersonal relationships. In a comment on Cross and Madson’s review, Baumeister and Sommer (1997) took issue with the implication that men are essentially noninterdependent and instead argued that men and women seek social connection in two different “spheres of belonging.” They contended that men have the same motivation for connectedness as women but that motivation is expressed through associations with large groups rather than through intimate relationships. In effect, they argue that men and women differ in the relative emphasis on or importance of relational versus collective forms of social bonding.

The thesis that there are gender differences in relational versus collective forms of interdependence was tested empirically by Gabriel and Gardner (1999), who found evidence for the predicted differences in self-construal, emotional experiences, selective memory, and behavioral intentions. In spontaneous self-concept as assessed by responses to the Twenty Statements Test (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954), women produced a significantly higher proportion of relational self-descriptors than did men, whereas men produced significantly more
Consistent with Baumeister and Sommer’s (1997) contentions, males and females did not differ in the total number of interdependent self-descriptions, only in the type. Further, Gabriel and Gardner (1999) found that women scored higher than men on the Relational Interdependence Self-Construal Scale (Cross, Bacon, and Morris, 2000) but that men scored higher than women on a modified Collective Interdependence version of the scale.

Consistent with these gender differences in social self-construal, Gabriel and Gardner (1999) also found that men were more likely to recall emotional experiences that were group based, whereas women recalled more relationship-based emotional experiences, and that men showed greater selective memory for collective social information compared with women, who selectively recalled more relational events. Finally, male participants were significantly more likely to indicate behavioral intentions that would benefit a collective over self-interest, whereas female participants were more likely to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of a relationship. In later follow-up studies, Seeley et al. (2003) found further that women’s ratings of the importance and value placed on their group memberships correlated with the extent to which they were relationally attached to other group members, whereas men’s ratings were relatively more influenced by their attachment to the group identity.

Additional evidence of gender differences in the locus of the social self comes from research using the Relational, Individual, and Collective Self-Aspects scale (RIC) developed by Kashima and Hardie (2000) as an instrument to assess the relative importance of the three aspects for an individual’s self-definition. The RIC scale consists of 10 sentence stems dealing with different life issues (e.g., “I think it is most important in life to . . .”; I would feel proud if . . .”), each followed by three options reflecting the three self-aspects (e.g., have personal integrity; have good personal relationships with people who are important to me; work for causes to improve the well-being of my groups). Respondents rate each option in terms of its applicability to the self, yielding three subscale scores representing the relative prominence of each self-aspect. Research with this scale has consistently found that female respondents score higher on the Relational self-aspect component than do males (Kashima and Hardie, 2000; Kashima et al., 2004). In addition, controlling for Relational subscale scores, males score relatively higher on the Collective self-aspect subscale. Thus, several different self-report measures, using different measurement formats, have replicated this basic gender difference.

Also relevant are differences reported by Romero-Canyas and Downey (2005) between males and females high in rejection sensitivity (RS). Several of their studies suggested that high-RS females respond more intensely to threats of interpersonal rejection or loss, whereas high-RS males are more responsive to loss of social status, peer-group rejection, or public rejection. These findings are consistent with the idea that RS exacerbates sex differences that have been reported in other studies of social belonging needs.

Based on these preceding studies of gender differences in social self-construal, Maddux and Brewer (2005) assumed that men and women would defer in their default interpretation of the meaning of we, with women more likely to think in
terms of interpersonal relationships (personal ties) and men more likely to think of larger collectives (social identities). They conducted an experiment in which male and female participants were all primed with the concept we and then engaged in a decision task that assessed their willingness to trust an anonymous stranger. Conditions of the experiment varied in what minimal information was provided about the unknown “other.” In one condition, participants were told that the other person was from their own university (shared ingroup membership); in a second condition, the other was identified as someone from another university where the participant had no associations (outgroup membership); and in a third condition, the stranger was from another university but one where the participant had some personal acquaintance (outgroup with network connection). As expected, both male and female participants trusted an ingroup member more than an outgroup member, and to the same degree. Where they differed was in the third condition where there was some indirect personal connection to the outgroup. In that condition, women showed higher trust than men. These results were interpreted as indicating that women were more influenced by the presence of indirect interpersonal ties to an outgroup member whereas males were responsive only to the ingroup–outgroup distinction itself.

In sum, there is now a large body of evidence that (at least in Western societies) women’s self-construals tend to be more relational than men’s and that men’s social self-construals are more collective than women’s and that these differences in self-definition are associated with systematic differences in motivation, emotion, cognition, and social decision making.

Independent or Complementary?

The cumulative evidence of gender differences in the relative importance placed on close relationships versus collective group memberships as forms of social connection has sometimes been interpreted as evidence that the two forms of social belonging are substitutable (e.g., Baumeister and Sommer, 1997; Gabriel and Gardner, 1999). The implication is that individuals who are socialized to meet their needs for belonging through intimate interpersonal relationships have less need for identifying with larger social collectives and vice versa. This is consistent with the notion that social belonging is a single motive that can be satisfied in multiple ways.

I take issue with this contention that close relationships and inclusion in groups are two interchangeable means to meeting the same need for belonging. For one thing, the evidence for sex differences in self-construal is relative rather than absolute. In almost all of the studies assessing gender differences in self-definition and importance of social connectedness, relational bonds are found to be more salient and important than collective identities for both men and women (Seeley et al., 2003). Where the sexes differ is in the relative importance of collective identities and group inclusion, above and beyond relational attachments. This is consistent with an evolutionary perspective in which relational bonds are viewed as primary and essential to survival (see Chapter 3 in this volume) and collective attachments as representing a separate adaptive mechanism that evolved later,
both phylogenetically and ontogenetically (cf. Bugental, 2000). I speculate later in this chapter about why individuals might differ in the extent and importance of collective attachments, but first I describe a model of relational and collective selves as distinct regulatory systems in the social domain, analogous in some ways to the distinction between hunger and thirst in the physical domain.

REGULATING BELONGING: OPPOSING MOTIVES

Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness model was developed as a motivational theory of social identity and attachment to large social groups. According to the optimal distinctiveness model, social identities derive from a fundamental tension between an individual’s need for inclusion and belonging on the one hand and differentiation and distinctiveness on the other. More specifically, it is proposed that social identities are selected and activated to the extent that they help to achieve a balance between needs for inclusion and for differentiation in a given social context.

The basic premise of the optimal distinctiveness model is that the two identity needs (inclusion–assimilation and differentiation–distinctiveness) are independent and work in opposition to motivate group identification. Individuals seek social inclusion in order to alleviate or avoid the isolation or stigmatization that may arise from being highly individuated (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). On the other hand, too much similarity or excessive deindividuation provides no basis for comparative appraisal or self-definition, and, hence, individuals are also uncomfortable in situations in which they lack distinctiveness (Fromkin, 1972; Vignoles, Chryssochoou, and Breakwell, 2000).

As opposing drives, the inclusion motive and the differentiation motive hold each other in check. As the individual is immersed in larger and more inclusive social units, activation of the need for inclusion is decreased but the level of activation of the differentiation motive is increased. Conversely, as the individual moves toward disconnection from large social collectives in the direction of differentiation into smaller, more exclusive social units, the need for differentiation subsides but the level of activation of the need for inclusion is increased. The resultant counterpressures lead the individual toward an equilibrium point where the sense of self is extended to collectives that are sufficiently inclusive and sufficiently exclusive to satisfy both needs simultaneously. Optimal group identities are those that satisfy the need for inclusion within the ingroup and simultaneously serve the need for differentiation through distinctions between the ingroup and outgroups. To satisfy the needs simultaneously, individuals will select group identities that are inclusive enough that they have a sense of being part of a large collective but are exclusive enough that they provide some basis for distinctiveness from others.

Extending the Optimal Distinctiveness Model

Optimal distinctiveness theory was originally intended to apply exclusively to the collective social self. However, Brewer and Gardner (1996) noted that analogous
opposing needs for differentiation and assimilation may also be involved in individual and relational selves to determine optimal identities at those levels as well (see also Brewer and Roccas, 2001). This extension of the opposing motives model is depicted in Table 10.1. At the collective level, the conflict is between belonging and inclusion on the one hand, and separation and distinctiveness on the other. At the individual level, the needs are expressed in the opposition between the desire for similarity on the one hand and the need for uniqueness on the other (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). At the interpersonal (relational) level, the tension is represented by conflicts between the need for autonomy and the need for interdependence and intimacy with specific others. At each level, the person must achieve some optimal balance between these conflicting motives for defining self in relation to others.

The literature on romantic attachments, in particular, acknowledges that close relationships are characterized by tension between intimacy and autonomy. Ideal relationships serve both needs, and secure attachment figures (see Chapter 4 in this volume) provide for both supportive nurturance and autonomy and initiative. Insecure attachment can be engendered by overprotective nurturance as well as by rejection or unresponsiveness.

The extended optimal distinctiveness model views the individual social self as a complex of regulatory systems. In order to survive and function effectively, each person must maintain an optimal level of self-integrity, achieve and sustain a sufficient number of close relationships that meet competing needs for intimacy and autonomy, and maintain secure inclusion in optimally distinctive groups. Fulfilling each of these needs requires the basic components of a regulatory system, including an assessment function that monitors and registers the individual’s current state of need satisfaction, a comparator function that evaluates the current state against an ideal or goal state, and an activation (monitoring and coping) function that responds to discrepancies detected by the comparator and remains active until the discrepancy is reduced or eliminated (Pickett and Gardner, 2005). Just as hunger and thirst respond to different cues of physiological deprivation and activate different cravings and goal representations, the relational and social self are regulated by different cues to satisfaction and deprivation. Each system is sensitive to different states of social connectedness (e.g., “What is my current level of intimacy in my relationship with X?” “Am I feeling too different from others in this social context?” “Are the boundaries of my group being maintained?”), and the individual must be prepared to respond with appropriate corrective action when

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Self</th>
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<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
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<td>Relational</td>
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<td>Collective</td>
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Adapted from Brewer and Roccas (2001) (Table 12.1, p. 223)
assessed states of differentiation and assimilation deviate from optimal balance at any level of the social self.

Cross-System Effects

To postulate that relational and collective bonds are regulated by distinct systems is not to argue that the two are entirely independent or have no influence on each other. To the contrary, it is very likely that there is a good deal of transfer, both positive and negative, between satisfaction at one level of the social self and the other. Just as drinking 16 ounces of water can temporarily dampen hunger or cravings for food, so immersion in a large social collective can temporarily numb feelings of loneliness or isolation deriving from lack of close intimate relationships. Similarly, experiencing strong intimacy in an interpersonal relationship may, at least temporarily, reduce sensitivity to social inclusion (“It’s just us against the world…”).

Under some conditions, satisfaction of needs for optimal relationships and optimal group identities may be mutually facilitative. For example, choosing friends and lovers from within one’s own social ingroup may enhance both intimacy within the relationship and secure inclusion in the collective. Close others who share a common ingroup identity are more likely to understand one’s need to express group loyalty and adherence to collective symbols and norms, which in turn can enhance compatibility at the interpersonal level. However, even with intragroup relationships, the demands of maintaining close interpersonal bonds and responsibilities may conflict with the demands and obligations of group membership and establishing oneself as a good and loyal group member. When identity needs at different levels of the self conflict, it may be necessary that satisfaction at one level dominates over satisfaction at the other. It is here that individual differences in values and beliefs will determine how the two systems interact. In the final section of this chapter I consider the dynamic relationship between individual and cultural value differences and the interaction among individual, relational, and collective self-regulation.

INDIVIDUAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL SELVES

It is difficult to discuss issues of independence and interdependence, autonomy and intimacy, or personal and social identity without at some point taking into account the influence of cultural differences in values and beliefs about social relationships. According to optimal distinctiveness theory, all human beings have some need for inclusion and some need for differentiation and some resultant collective social selves. Although the principles incorporated in the model are presumed to be universal, the model can also accommodate individual, situational, and cultural differences in the relative activation of inclusion and differentiation needs and the nature of optimal identities. Particularly relevant are cultural differences associated with
the dimension of individualism—collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Although individualism and collectivism are multifaceted constructs, they refer basically to variations across cultures in whether individuals are viewed as separate and autonomous entities or as interconnected and embedded in interdependent social relationships, along with normative prescriptions and values about the priority to be given to individual, interpersonal, and group interests (Brewer and Chen, 2007).

**Two Types of Collectivism**

All societies must meet primary needs for both individual and social identity and provide for an effective interface between individual self-interest and collective interests and welfare. Although the capacity for social identity is postulated to be universal, the locus and content of social identities are clearly culturally defined and regulated. Across all societies, individuals maintain close personal relationships, small-group interpersonal networks, and membership in large, symbolic groups. But cultural systems rely more or less heavily on these different forms of social connection as the primary locus for defining the social self and exercising social control over individual behavior. Thus, people in all cultures have three levels of social orientation: individual, relational, and collective levels of the self. What differs among people across cultures is the salience and priority of these three different selves (Brewer and Yuki, 2007).

Consistent with Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) comparison between relational social identities and collective social identities, I make a further distinction between two types of collectivism (Brewer and Chen, 2007). One form of collectivism (relational collectivism) stresses interpersonal relationships, mutual cooperation, dependence, and concern for specific persons within a closely interconnected social network. Relational collectivism is associated with the degree of felt obligation and responsibility to one’s family, close friends, and immediate community. The second form of collectivism (group-based collectivism) stresses dependence on and obligation to a group as a whole, valuing obedience to group norms and authority and subordinating individual interests to those of the collective. Collectivist values are not directed to fellow group members as individuals but to the group as a whole.

Individualism, relationalism, and group-based collectivism are not mutually exclusive value systems, but they do specify priorities that may sometimes be in conflict with each other. In such instances, the relative importance of individualistic values, relational values, or collectivist values determines what an individual decides to do when personal preferences conflict with the preference of others or when meeting the needs of a close personal relationship conflicts with duties and responsibilities to the collective. An individual’s primary value orientation is the one that takes precedence over competing values at any particular time.

Although the three levels of self-representation are hypothesized to be distinct self-systems, it is reasonable to assume that the way needs for identity and esteem are met at one level will have some influence on the activation of parallel motives at other levels.
Cultural values and group norms that emphasize either separation or assimilation at each level have carryover effects at other levels. For instance, if the needs for autonomy and intimacy are optimized by relatively high levels of intimacy (relative to autonomy) at the interpersonal level, there may be a particularly strong activation of the need for uniqueness (difference relative to similarity) at the individual level. Similarly, the relative emphasis on autonomy and uniqueness versus interdependence and similarity at the individual and interpersonal levels may influence the relative activation of the needs for inclusion and differentiation at the collective level.

Some nonobvious implications of this interplay between optimal identity at different levels of self-construal were drawn out by Brewer and Roccas (2001). Their reasoning follows from some assumptions about the implications of collectivist and individualistic value systems for the nature of the connections between individuals and their social groups and the meaning of ingroup membership (and collective identity) itself. Relational collectivist values place considerable emphasis on obligation, mutual interdependence, and responsibility to close others (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, 2002). Thus, interpersonal attachments for relational collectivists represent a high-investment commitment. The benefits of connections are high in that they provide security and guaranteed mutual aid. But the costs of inclusion are commensurate with the benefits in terms of obligations and duties to close others that demand time and resources on a nonnegotiable basis.

Under such a system of values, both the benefits and latent costs of belonging are related to the size and exclusivity of the interpersonal network. When intragroup obligations are strong and underwritten by group norms and sanctions, the benefits of group inclusion can be met within a relatively small, exclusive social unit. (To put it more formally, as the probability of receiving help and support from a fellow group member approaches 1.00, the fewer group members are needed to assure that help will be available when needed.) By the same token, when obligations to others are strong, it becomes especially important to limit the scope of obligation to those who are clearly a part of the same system of reciprocal aid and mutual obligation (Takagi, 1996; Yamagishi, Jin, and Kiyonari, 1999). With relational collectivist values and norms, it is very costly to extend the bounds of the group too widely or to bestow the benefits of group membership to those who do not clearly meet group norms. Thus, relational collectivists should be highly concerned with ingroup distinctiveness and should make sharp distinctions between norms that apply to ingroup and those that apply to outgroup others. Relational values should be associated with strong social identification with relatively small social groups and with high sensitivity to changes that would increase ingroup size. Connectedness to others based on strong interpersonal ties and networks may inherently conflict with a depersonalized representation of social groups and associated values.

A number of comparative studies have supported this idea that relational collectivist values are associated with high differentiation of ingrouper (close others) and outgroupers. For example, Leung (1988) found that, in responses to conflict scenarios between two disputants, Hong Kong Chinese college students
were less likely to pursue a conflict with an ingroup disputant (close friends) and more likely to pursue a conflict with an outgroup disputant (strangers) than were American students. Similarly, studies on distributive justice have shown that people from collectivist cultures apply different reward allocation norms to ingroup and outgroup. Leung and Bond (1984), for instance, found that Chinese participants shared the rewards more equally with the friends, but with an out-group stranger they adhered to the equity norm more closely than did the Americans. Likewise, Mahler, Greenberg, and Hayashi (1981) asked students in Japan and the United States how rewards should be divided in a set of stories describing two workers. American participants tended to favor an equity allocation based on relative contribution of the two workers, regardless of whether the workers were friends or not. Japanese participants, on the other hand, favored an equality allocation when the two workers were described as strongly connected, though their allocation preferences were the same as Americans when the story presented implied that the two workers were not strongly connected.

Compared with relational collectivist values, individualistic value orientations have very different implications for the demands and level of investment associated with interpersonal relationships. With its emphasis on autonomy and agency at the individual level, individualism suppresses the need for intimacy vis-à-vis autonomy and reduces felt obligation and commitment to close relationships. At first glance, it may appear that individualistic values are incompatible with the very notion of collective social selves. To the contrary, I believe that individualism has very direct effects on the need for inclusion in larger social units. Members of individualistic groups and societies are dependent on each other just as members of collectivist groups are. The difference is in how this interdependence is negotiated and reflected in shared values. Consistent with the ideas presented by Simon and Kampmeier (2001), I argue that individual autonomy and collective identity (especially identification with large, inclusive groups) are quite compatible.

Individualism gives greater weight to personal interests and preferences in resolving potentially conflicting demands of individual achievement and the welfare of others. In such a value system, obligations to others are not absolute or highly reliable. Thus, the potential benefits of ingroup inclusion are diffused and probabilistic, and individuals need to be part of larger and more inclusive social units in order to reap the benefits of security and mutual aid associated with group membership. Ironically, then, the characteristics of individualistic value orientations lead to relatively chronic activation of the need for inclusion and relatively low arousal of the need for differentiation (a need that is chronically met by the emphasis on individual responsibility and self-expression). Individuals with individualistic value orientations, then, should exhibit moderately high levels of social identification across a wide range of social groups and be relatively tolerant of within-group diversity and intergroup similarity.

Somewhat paradoxically, I am arguing that individualists are more likely to focus on the collective level of the social self than are relational collectivists. Connectedness to others based on strong interpersonal ties and networks may inherently conflict with a depersonalized representation of social groups and
associated values. This argument is consistent with the findings reviewed earlier on gender differences in social belonging when it is recognized that in Western societies, males tend to be higher in individualism than females (Cross and Madson, 1997; Watkins et al., 1998). It is also consistent with findings from cross-cultural studies of individualism-collectivism indicating that Americans (who generally score high on measures of individualism) are found to be no less collectivistic than East Asians (particularly Japanese and Korean), depending on the scale contents of collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier, 2002). For instance, compared with the Japanese, Americans score higher on collectivism items such as “belonging to the ingroup” and “seeking others’ advice” while lower on collectivism items such as “valuing group harmony,” “valuing hierarchy and groups goals,” and “preference for working in groups.”

Cross-cultural studies also have found that American individualists show no less, if not more, ingroup favoritism than East Asian collectivists when the ingroup is a social category or large collective. For instance, Bond and Hewstone (1988) found that British high school students in Hong Kong had more positive images of their ingroup than did Chinese students. Similarly, Rose’s (1985) cross-national comparative study found that Americans had more favorable views of their country than did Japanese. Moreover, Snibbe et al. (2003) found less ingroup bias among Japanese football fans compared with their American counterparts, even though both cultural groups equally identified with their university and the sports team. In general, ingroup identity among East Asians and other relational collectivists is based primarily on loyalty and attachment to interpersonal relationships within the group, but ingroup bias among individualists is based on loyalty and attachment to the group as a whole in comparison with other groups (Yuki, 2003).

Reprise

Again, the existence of individual and cultural differences in relative strength of relational versus collective forms of social bonding could be used as evidence of substitutability of the two modes of belonging. But I am arguing that the differences represent interactions across systems, based on how competing needs for assimilation and differentiation are balanced at each level of the social self. When autonomy trumps intimacy at the relational level, the need for inclusion in larger collectives is enhanced; when relational ties are strong, interpersonal obligations may take precedence over collective interests. But dominance of one mode over the other is relative rather than absolute, emerging under conditions where the demands of one form of social bonding are in conflict with the other. Across the lifespace, all individuals need both forms of social connectedness to function effectively, and long-term deficits in either domain will not be compensated for by high degrees of belonging in the other. Further, relational ties and collective ties are mutually facilitative, as close intragroup relationships solidify group identification and shared group identities enhance interpersonal bonds. As complex social animals, human beings require both personalized and depersonalized forms of interdependence—belonging with and belonging to.
REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

1. In this light, it is interesting that Shaver and Mikulincer report that avoidant-attached individuals are generally resistant to the positive effects of intragroup cohesion and interpersonal ties.

2. The distinction between inclusion–differentiation on the one hand and similarity–uniqueness on the other is subtle but important. Similarity refers to the degree or extent of overlap between one’s own characteristics (e.g., attributes, attitudes) and those of another individual or a group prototype. Inclusion refers to the number of others with whom one shares a collective bond (which may be based on a single shared characteristic).

3. It should be noted that this tension between conflicting goals within relationships is not the same as the distinction between approach and avoidance motives, as discussed in Chapter 13 of this volume.
Developmental Antecedents of Emotion in Romantic Relationships

JEFFRY A. SIMPSON, W. ANDREW COLLINS, SISI TRAN, AND KATHERINE C. HAYDON

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INTRODUCTION

Some of life's most intense emotions are experienced within close relationships. Berscheid and Reis (1998) claimed that identifying the origins and the profile of emotions experienced within a relationship is essential if one wants to really understand its most important features. Given this reality, one might expect a great deal would be known about the experience and expression of emotions in close relationships and, in particular, how relationship experiences at critical stages of social development forecast the type and intensity of emotions that are experienced in adult attachment relationships. Surprisingly little, however, is known about these issues.

In this chapter, we use attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) and attachment constructs as organizing frameworks to fill these crucial conceptual and empirical gaps in our knowledge of emotions in close relationships. After reviewing relevant theory and research on this topic, we discuss the findings of a recent longitudinal study that has continuously tracked the same sample of individuals from birth into early adulthood.

ATTACHMENT THEORY AND EMOTIONS

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) provides a unique and comprehensive account of the normative (i.e., species-typical) and individual difference (i.e., individual-specific) processes that typically generate emotions in close relationships. According to Bowlby, the attachment system serves two primary functions: (1) to protect vulnerable individuals from potential threats; and (2) to regulate negative affect once threats are perceived. The normative component of attachment theory specifies the stimuli and contexts that should evoke and terminate certain types of emotions and the sequence of emotions usually experienced in response to certain relational events (such as the sequence of protest, despair, and detachment that typically follows prolonged separations from attachment figures; see Bowlby, 1969). The individual difference component of the theory articulates how an individual's personal history of receiving care and support from attachment figures across the lifespan shapes the goals, working models, and coping strategies that he or she recruits when emotion-eliciting stimuli or events occur in relationships. To date, most of the research that has examined the impact of early attachment experiences on later relationships has focused on the distinction between secure and insecure attachment histories (Roisman et al., 2005; Thompson, 1999; Waters and Cummings, 2000).

Kobak and Sceery (1988) proposed that the way in which individuals perceive and manage emotions in relationships ought to depend on the nature of the working models they have formed in response to their unique attachment experiences. These authors suggest the following:
Secure attachment [should] be organized by rules that allow acknowledgement of distress and turning to others for support, avoidant attachment by rules that restrict acknowledgement of distress and the associated attachment attempts to seek comfort and support, and ambivalent attachment by rules that direct attention toward distress and attachment figures in a hypervigilant manner that inhibits the development of autonomy and self-confidence. (p. 142)

Building on these ideas, Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) developed a process model that outlines the conditions under which the attachment system should be activated and terminated in individuals who have different attachment histories (see also Chapter 4 in this volume). When potential threats arise and are perceived, more secure people ought to remain confident that their current attachment figures will be sufficiently attentive, responsive, and available to meet their needs and reduce their distress. These beliefs should increase their sense of felt security, deactivating their attachment systems and allowing more secure persons to enact constructive, problem-focused coping strategies.

Insecurely attached individuals, in contrast, have attachment systems that are more vulnerable to chronic activation, motivating them to use more interpersonal or self-focused strategies to compensate for uncertainty about their partners’ ultimate level of responsiveness. According to Mikulincer and Shaver (2003), different strategies are used by individuals who define the two major subcategories of insecurity originally described by Ainsworth et al. (1978). When individuals who are more anxiously attached perceive potential threats, they typically are uncertain as to whether their attachment figures will be sufficiently attentive, available, and responsive to their needs. These worries sustain their chronic anxiety and keep their attachment systems “on line” and elevated, resulting in emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., remaining hypervigilant to signs of possible loss and ruminating about worst-case scenarios). When individuals who are more avoidance attached feel threatened, they experience—but may not be fully aware of—distress and anxiety at a physiological level. To keep their attachment systems in check, more avoidant individuals inhibit and control their emotions by turning to avoidant coping strategies (e.g., withdrawing from threatening interactions; denying, discounting, or underestimating possible threats).

Mikulincer and Shaver (2005) recently suggested that each style of coping operates in the service of achieving specific interpersonal goals. More securely attached individuals, for instance, strive to build greater intimacy with their attachment figures. More insecurely attached individuals, by comparison, cope differently depending on their particular form of insecurity. Highly anxious persons yearn to achieve greater felt security, whereas highly avoidant persons seek to maintain interpersonal autonomy and personal control. In combination, these countervailing goals, working models, and coping strategies should shunt individuals who have different attachment histories down distinct pathways of experiencing and expressing emotions in adult relationships.
THE EXPERIENCE OF EMOTION IN RELATIONSHIPS

In recent years, there has been growing interest in how and why different types of emotions are experienced in relationships (e.g., the Emotion-in-Relationships Model [ERM]; Berscheid and Ammazzalorso, 2001). Much of what is currently known about the experience of emotions in relationships can be understood from an attachment perspective (see Mikulincer and Shaver, 2005, for a review). For example, in situations where relationship partners behave negatively, more securely attached individuals should experience what Bowlby (1973) termed functional anger, which, in turn, should facilitate more constructive and relationship-enhancing perceptions and actions. More insecurely attached individuals, by comparison, should exhibit dysfunctional anger, which ought to promote security-oriented goals and behaviors (in the case of people with anxious attachment histories) or control/autonomy-focused goals and behaviors (in the case of those with avoidant histories). We now review what is currently known about how adult attachment orientations are associated with both negative and positive partner behaviors.

Negative Partner Behaviors

Studies investigating negative partner behaviors have confirmed that individuals classified as secure on the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; Main and Goldwyn, 1998) behave more constructively when their partners act negatively than do those classified as insecure (Zimmermann et al., 2001). In addition, adults classified as dismissive on the AAI are rated by their friends as being more emotionally hostile (Kobak and Sceery, 1988), and dismissive teens display greater dysfunctional and inappropriate anger (rated by observers) when they are trying to resolve problems with their mothers (Kobak et al., 1993).

Studies using adult romantic attachment measures (i.e., anxiety and avoidance; Brennan, Clark, and Shaver, 1998; Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996) have also confirmed that women who report being more avoidantly attached display greater dysfunctional anger toward their romantic partners than do less avoidant women when they (more avoidant women) are distressed and receive less support from their partners (Rholes, Simpson, and Oriña, 1999). Highly anxious women also display greater dysfunctional anger in this situation relative to less anxious women, but only after their distress has subsided and only if their romantic partners behaved less supportively when they were distressed. Other research has shown that more anxiously attached individuals report a flood of negative feelings when their romantic partners behave badly toward them. Specifically, they report having intrusive memories and perceptions, ruminate about and amplify their negative feelings, and consequently feel worse about their partners and relationships (Mikulincer, 1998). Highly anxious individuals also report and display more dysfunctional anger, hostility, and distress when they attempt to resolve major—but not minor—relationship-based problems with their romantic partners (Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996).
Positive Partner Behaviors

When relationship partners behave positively, more securely attached individuals should experience an assortment of positive emotions in light of the fact that positive behaviors often signal availability, responsiveness, support, or validation (Clark, Fitness, and Brissette, 2001). Insecurely attached individuals, on the other hand, should experience less intense positive emotions—or perhaps more negative emotions—in response to positive partner behaviors. Positive actions by partners may lead insecurely attached individuals to feel as if they do not deserve, cannot reciprocate, or might fail to meet their partner's positive expectations (in the case of highly anxious persons) or to worry about the loss of interpersonal control and personal autonomy (in the case of highly avoidant persons).

Studies investigating the emotional correlates of positive partner behaviors have confirmed that persons who are dismissive on the AAI display fewer genuine positive emotions when exposed to positive stimuli (Spangler and Zimmermann, 1999). In parallel fashion, individuals who report being more anxiously or avoidantly attached to romantic partners also display fewer positive emotions during both important events (Horppu and Ikonen-Varila, 2001) and more mundane ones (Magai et al., 2000). Highly anxious and avoidant individuals also report feeling fewer positive emotions in group interactions (Rom and Mikulincer, 2003), and they report having fewer positive emotions when interacting with different people in daily diary studies (Pietromonaco and Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, and Shaver, 1996). Finally, individuals who report being more avoidantly attached indicate that they feel less gratitude when their romantic partners act positively toward them, whereas more anxious individuals feel mixed or conflicting emotions (Mikulincer, Shaver, and Slav, 2006).

LONGITUDINAL-DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVES ON EMOTION IN RELATIONSHIPS

According to Bowlby (1980), emotional reactions to relationship events are partially rooted in earlier relationship experiences, initially with early caregivers and then with other significant relationship partners in adolescence and adulthood (Ainsworth, 1989; Waters and Cummings, 2000). This core tenet of attachment theory has inspired several longitudinal studies in which the same individuals have been studied continuously over time from infancy onward (e.g., Grossmann, Grossmann, and Waters, 2005; Sroufe et al., 2005). Although these studies differ in which specific features of attachment are examined, all of them have investigated how early attachment experiences prospectively predict the quality and functioning of close relationships in adolescence and early adulthood.

Bowlby (1973, 1980) argued that internal working models (mental representations) of earlier relationship experiences should affect later relationship experiences in patterned and meaningful ways. Representations of early relationship experiences, however, should not necessarily predict subsequent relationship outcomes in a straightforward manner. Instead, representations should be
modified continuously as individuals enter and leave different kinds of attachment relationships across successive developmental phases (Carlson, Sroufe, and Egeland, 2004). Relationship experiences with early peers following infancy, for example, should and do predict the quality of close friendships in adolescence. Furthermore, the quality of experiences with caregivers in infancy and early childhood should and often do forecast the quality of adolescent friendships, above and beyond the contributions of more proximal (concurrent) experiences with same-age peers (Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson, 1999).

In adult relationships, individuals’ attachment histories during infancy (assessed using the Strange Situation; Ainsworth et al., 1978) also predict certain features of their behavior with their romantic partners in early adulthood (Collins and Van Dulmen, 2006; Roisman et al., 2005). For example, if individuals were classified as having a disorganized pattern of attachment in infancy (Main and Solomon, 1990), their observer-rated conflict resolution interactions with current romantic partners in early adulthood are rated as containing fewer secure base behaviors, less balance between couple functioning and each partner’s personal interests or needs, less caring, less trust, less emotional closeness, less sensitivity to one another’s needs and wishes, and poorer overall outcomes. In addition, if individuals were disorganized during infancy, both these individuals and their romantic partners tend to display greater hostility in conflict resolution interactions.

Attachment insecurity assessed during infancy and early childhood also predicts other important relationship outcomes across development, including peer competence rated by classroom teachers between the ages of 6 and 8 (Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson, 1999) and ratings of parent–child interactions at age 13 (Sroufe et al., 2005). Additional evidence has documented links between these chronologically later measures of family interaction and subsequent romantic relationship behaviors and perceptions in early adulthood (Roisman et al., 2001). However, no research to date has investigated either the role of parent–child relationships prior to age 13 or the implications of these relations over time for the self-reported experience of different emotions in later romantic relationships.

Studies examining connections between early attachment security and behavior in later romantic relationships also suggest that chronologically later measures of nonfamilial relationships (e.g., teacher ratings of peer competence in early elementary school; the degree of security expressed about relationships with close friends during the teenage years) often mediate relations between early infant–caregiver relationships and behavior in adult romantic relationships. Most mediation effects, however, are partial, with the impact of early attachment measures remaining statistically independent and significant predictors of later developmental outcomes (Sroufe et al., 2005). Whether these patterns also hold for self-reported emotions in adult romantic relationships is unknown.

In sum, although past research has emphasized the attributes of individuals, concurrent relationship conditions, or interaction dynamics as determinants of the experience and expression of emotions in romantic relationships, the longitudinal findings reviewed herein suggest that the experience and expression of emotions in adult romantic relationships may reflect vestiges of important relationships from earlier periods of social development.
To test this developmental hypothesis, Simpson et al. (2007) conducted a study based on longitudinal data from 78 target participants who have been studied continuously from infancy into their mid 20s as part of the Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation from Birth to Adulthood.

Between the ages of 20 and 23, each target participant and his or her current romantic partner completed a battery of self-report relationship measures. Each couple was also videotaped while trying to resolve a major conflict in their relationship and completing a collaborative task. The primary goal of this project was to test whether and how attachment experiences and relationships during critical stages of development—in infancy, middle childhood, and adolescence—are systematically related to the self-reported experience and the observer-rated expression of emotions with romantic partners in early adulthood. We adopted the common practice of testing predicted differences between secure and insecure attachment histories.

Given theory and prior findings, we hypothesized and tested a double-mediation developmental model (see Simpson et al., 2007). According to this model, the emotional qualities of romantic relationships in early adulthood should be predicted by a set of sequential links from attachment security status in infancy, to the quality of peer relationships in childhood, to the quality of relationships with close friends in adolescence. We anticipated that the quality of childhood peer relationships and the quality of close friendships in adolescence would mediate the link between early attachment status (assessed in the Strange Situation at 12 months) and the emotional tenor of adult romantic relationships (assessed at ages 20–23). More specifically, individuals classified as secure in infancy should be rated as more socially competent by their grade-school teachers. Early social competence, in turn, should predict more strongly rated secure-base friendships during adolescence. And friendship security during adolescence should then predict both the experience and expression of less negative relative to positive emotion in adult romantic relationships.

This developmental model is based on the premise that relationships at any stage of development can be influenced by both familial and extrafamilial relationships at earlier stages (Sroufe et al., 2005). As a result, attachment relationships with caregivers early in life should have an impact not only on later relationships with caregivers but also on other important relationships with peers, close friends, and romantic partners across time. This developmental process is likely to involve dynamic interactions between experiences in one’s successive relationships and the mental representations of those experiences, which tend to be constructed and revised across relationships from each successive earlier period (Carlson, Sroufe, and Egeland, 2004).

The Sample and Early Developmental Measures

Our longitudinal study (Simpson et al., 2007) examined a subset of the full sample, namely those individuals who participated in the romantic relationship assessments...
in early adulthood \((N = 78)\). Target participants who had been involved in a romantic relationship for at least four months participated with their partners when target participants were between the ages of 20 and 23. The mean age of all participants was 21.60 years, and the mean length of relationships was 25.06 months. All couples were heterosexual.

Target participants and their partners were first interviewed separately, after which they completed self-report measures that assessed the functioning and views of their relationship. Each couple then discussed and tried to resolve major points of disagreement or contention in their relationship, which was followed by a collaborative problem-solving task. All interactions were videotaped and subsequently coded by trained observers on theoretically relevant constructs (see next section).

During earlier phases of the Minnesota Study of Risk and Adaptation from Birth to Adulthood, measures were collected at three pivotal stages of social development: (1) during early childhood (at 12 months); (2) during early elementary school (grades 1–3); and (3) during adolescence (at age 16). Assessments were conducted at these periods of social development because each represents a unique stage at which new and different kinds of relationships are being formed and developed.

The measurement approach we used is consistent with this conceptualization and with the principle of heterotypic continuity (see Caspi and Roberts, 2001; Rutter and Sroufe, 2000). According to this principle, the infancy measures obtained from target participants at 12 months assessed their attachment and exploratory behaviors with their caregivers in the Strange Situation. The middle childhood measures at ages 6–8 assessed target participants’ competence at engaging peers in social interactions and their attunement to interpersonal dynamics in organized peer groups in grades 1 through 3. The adolescence measure at age 16 assessed the nature and quality of target participants’ behaviors indicative of having secure attachment representations of close same-sex friends (e.g., greater disclosure, more trust, more authenticity). And the early adulthood measures at ages 20–23 indexed the experience and expression of emotions evident in target participants’ current romantic relationships. Even though target participants’ behaviors, relationships, and relationship representations were assessed by different measures in different relationships at different points of social development, the underlying meaning and function of those behaviors and representations should be consistent across time because the measures tap the general coherence of attachment representations and behaviors within each developmental stage.

We collected the following measures at each developmental stage.

**Infant Attachment Security** The quality of parent–infant attachment relationships was assessed at 12 months in the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Raters classified each infant’s attachment pattern as Secure, Avoidant, or Anxious/Resistant. We followed the conventional Secure versus Insecure scoring distinction, in which Avoidant and Anxious/Resistant classifications were collapsed into a single group; 61% of target participants were classified as Secure at 12 months, and 39% were Insecure.
Peer Competence  Peer competence was assessed in grades 1, 2, and 3. Each target participant’s classroom teacher was given a one-paragraph description of a hypothetical child who was well liked and respected by peers, had mutual friendships, demonstrated understanding of other children’s perspectives and ideas, and constructively engaged peers in activities. The teacher then rank-ordered all of the children in the classroom according to how closely each student matched these criteria. Teachers were not aware of which child was the target child. Peer competence scores, therefore, represent teachers’ perceptions of each target participant’s percentile rank in her class during first, second, and third grades, divided by the total number of students in each class. Each target participant received a mean peer competence percentile ranking relative to his or her classmates averaged across grades 1, 2, and 3.

Friendship Security  Each target participant’s level of friendship security was evaluated by raters at age 16 from a comprehensive audiotaped interview. This measure was developed based on the premise that attachment security in later relationships should be facilitated by security in earlier relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969; Thompson, 1999). Specifically, target participants were asked to describe their close friendships, including whether and how they disclosed behaviors and feelings indicative of trust and authenticity in them. Ratings assessed the degree to which each adolescent felt comfortable telling private details to close friends, how friends would respond to such disclosures, and whether the adolescent felt “close” to friends. This scale, therefore, indexed the extent to which target participants felt that they could be themselves in their friendships, expected friends to be available and supportive, and could mutually share positive and negative emotional and interpersonal experiences with them.

Contemporary Self-Report Measures
At ages 20–23, target participants and their current romantic partners completed the following relationship-based measures.

Emotional Tone of the Relationship  The Emotional Tone Index (ETI; Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto, 1989) is a self-report instrument that measures the extent to which individuals experience different emotions in their current relationship. The ETI taps 12 positive emotions and 15 negative ones that vary in intensity from high (e.g., elated, angry) to low (e.g., content, disappointed). It has three subscales: (1) the extent to which individuals experience positive emotions (the sum of the 12 positive emotion items); (2) the extent to which they experience negative emotions (the sum of the 15 negative emotion items); and (3) the relative balance of positive versus negative emotions (i.e., the mean of the positive emotion index minus the mean of the negative emotion index). We focused primarily on the relative balance scores reported by both target participants and their romantic partners.
Contemporary Relationship Observation Measures

Couples also completed a videotaped observational procedure in the laboratory that involved two interaction tasks: the Markman-Cox procedure and the Ideal Couple Q-sort. The Markman-Cox procedure (Cox, 1991) is designed to elicit conflict between relationship partners. In the first phase of the procedure, each partner identified and rated the most salient problems in the relationship. Each couple then chose the one problem that generated the most conflict. In the second phase, each couple discussed the problem and tried to reach a solution within 10 minutes.

Immediately after the conflict task, each couple completed an Ideal Couple Q-sort (Collins et al., 1999), which is designed to elicit collaborative behaviors. Each couple was given 45 cards, each of which listed a potential quality of a hypothetical romantic couple (e.g., make sacrifices for each other, have the same interests). Each couple read each card aloud and decided which of three baskets it should be placed in: “Most like an ideal couple,” “Least like an ideal couple,” or “Middle/Unsure.” Couples were instructed to base their decisions on their ideas of an “ideal couple” rather than on their own relationship.

Trained observers then rated each of the interactions on scales assessing the amount of Shared Positive Affect, Shared Negative Affect, Anger, Hostility, Conflict Resolution, Secure Base Behavior, and Overall Quality (see Sroufe et al., 2005). Ratings were also made on three “balance scales” that indexed the extent to which the partners facilitated (1) acceptance of openness and vulnerability; (2) individual growth in the relationship; and (3) effective completion of the problem-solving task. All scales were coded at the dyadic level. The affect scales assessed the extent to which each couple engaged in reciprocal exchanges of positive affect, negative affect, anger, and hostility. Two global relationship observation measures were calculated (see Roisman et al., 2001). The first measure, Romantic Relationship Process, was a composite of Positive Affect, Secure Base, Balance Scales 1 and 2, Conflict Resolution, and Overall Quality. The second measure, Romantic Relationship Negative Affect, was a composite of the Anger, Hostility, and Dyadic Negative Affect scales.

Finally, we calculated the ETI relative balance score of each participant, statistically controlling for his or her partner’s ETI score, as well as a composite (z-scored) index composed of observer-rated adult relationship process scores, observer-rated negative affect scores, and both partners’ self-reported ETI relative balance scores.

Primary Findings

We tested the hypothesized structural relations between the antecedent measures and the nature and quality of emotions experienced in adult romantic relationships in early adulthood (both self-reported and observer-rated) using structural equation modeling (SEM). More specifically, we tested a structural model for each of the three main dependent variables: (1) observer-rated adult romantic relationship process scores (from the videotaped discussions); (2) observer-rated negative affect scores (from the videotaped discussions); and (3) both partners’
self-reported emotion balance scores on the ETI. We also tested a model in which the three dependent variables were summed to form a single composite dependent variable.

Our first model tested whether the link between infant attachment security and the adult romantic relationship process measure was mediated through the peer competence in elementary school measure and the friendship security at age 16 measure. As shown in Figure 11.1 (see subscript a), this model provided a good fit to the data. The second model tested whether the association between infant attachment security and the adult negative affect measure was mediated through peer competence and security at age 16 (Figure 11.1, subscript b). Once again, this model fit the data well.

The third model tested whether the link between infant attachment security and ETI balance scores were mediated by peer competence and security at age 16 (Figure 11.1, subscript c). Unlike the dependent variables in the first two models, the ETI balance scale involved self-reports provided by both the target participant and his or her current romantic partner. If our basic hypothesis is correct, antecedent relationship experiences in an individual’s life should predict the emotional tone (i.e., positive relative to negative emotions) of his or her current romantic relationship, even when reports of emotional tone provided by the partner are statistically controlled. To control for the partner’s influence on each target participant’s emotional tone scores, we created a residualized variable in which the ETI balance scores reported by each partner were partialed from each target participant’s ETI balance scores. This residualized measure was then treated as the dependent measure in the third model. As expected, model 3 also fit the data well.

If the hypothesized double-mediation model is robust, it should emerge when the three dependent measures are aggregated. Accordingly, Model 4 tested whether the association between the infant attachment index and the composite measure of all three dependent variables—adult romantic relationship process, adult negative affect, and adult emotional tone—was mediated through peer competence and security at age 16 (Figure 11.1, subscript d). As expected, this model fit the data well.

Figure 11.1  Structural models 1–4.

\[0.36^{**}_{abcd}\]

\[0.38^{**}_{abcd}\]

\[0.41^{***}_{a}\]

\[-0.35^{**}_{b}\]

\[0.27^*_{c}\]

\[0.43^{***}_{d}\]

\[0.05_{a}\]

\[0.20^*_{c}\]

\[0.19^*_{d}\]

\[0.20^*_{c}\]

\[0.19^*_{d}\]

$^{p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.}$
Several strands of evidence indicate that these double-mediation effects are robust. First, the effects are consistent despite the fact that the two observer ratings of expressed emotion (Relationship Process and Negative Affect) share no method variance with the ETI self-reports. Second, all of the effects remain reliable even when variance associated with the partner’s self-reports of emotions in the relationship are partialed from each target participant’s self-reports. Third, the double-mediation pattern also emerges when the three primary dependent measures are aggregated into a single composite index. Fourth, when alternative models were examined, the double-mediation model continued to provide a stronger or a more parsimonious fit to the data than alternative models for each dependent measure. Viewed together, these results offer fairly compelling evidence for the double-mediation model.

LARGER THEORETICAL ISSUES

Bowlby (1979) claimed that attachment relationships contribute to personality and social development “from the cradle to the grave.” The findings of this unique longitudinal study support this core premise of attachment theory. Assessing relationship experiences at four critical stages of development, we found that the experience and expression of emotions in adult romantic relationships are meaningfully tied to attachment-relevant experiences earlier in social development. Specifically, the early attachment security of target participants at 12 months of age predicted their competence with peers (rated by teachers) during early elementary school. Elementary school peer competence, in turn, predicted the degree of security evident in target participants’ representations of close friendships at age 16. This measure then predicted both daily reports of emotions experienced in romantic relationships (reported by both target participants and their partners) as well as the expression of emotions (rated by observers) during videotaped interaction tasks. Corroborating Bowlby’s conjectures, therefore, both the experience and expression of emotion in romantic relationships are tied in significant and meaningful ways to experiences rooted in earlier relationships and stages of social development. However, the findings also reveal that earlier developmental stages tend to have the strongest and most direct impact on the stages immediately following them.

In the final section of the chapter, we elaborate how these results extend attachment theory, add to the developmental attachment literature and expand our understanding of emotions in adult romantic relationships. We also speculate on how the current results can be understood within the ERM (Berscheid and Ammazzalorso, 2001).

Theoretical and Empirical Extensions

Bowlby (1980) argued that life’s deepest and most intense emotions arise within attachment relationships. Indeed, one of the principal functions of the attachment
system is to regulate negative affect, especially when individuals are ill, fatigued, afraid, overly challenged, or in pain. Bowlby also believed that experiences in and representations of attachment-based relationships from earlier periods of social development should leave residual traces on attachment relationships later in life. Pointing to Waddington’s (1957) epigenetic landscape model, Bowlby (1973) likened social development to a railway system in which individuals set out on one developmental track early in life and then encounter multiple branch points at crucial stages of social development that can lead to different destinations (outcomes) in adulthood. Bowlby believed that the quality of the caregiving environment figures prominently not only in determining which developmental “track” individuals take at critical junctures but also in sustaining movement down a particular track (see Fraley and Brumbaugh, 2004). The findings of this longitudinal study extend our understanding of these attachment processes not only by confirming that the quality of attachment relationships earlier in life are systematically related to the emotional tenor of later adult romantic relationships but also by pinpointing one developmental pathway through which past relationships might impinge on current ones.

From a developmental perspective, these findings also reconfirm that adult relationship experiences are embedded in processes that begin with early caregiving conditions and that the qualities of early caregiving are then carried forward through important relationships in successive developmental periods (Collins and Sroufe, 1999; Sroufe, 1989). This carry-forward process is likely to be complex, involving the interplay of internal working models and social relationships that are associated with different developmental periods between infancy and adolescence (Carlson, Sroufe, and Egeland, 2004). The current findings also indicate that this process continues into early adulthood and may partially explain the pattern of emotions that individuals experience and express in their adult romantic relationships.

**The Findings in the Context of the ERM**

The current study was not designed to test the ERM (Berscheid and Ammazzalorso, 2001). Nevertheless, one can envision how vestiges of an individual’s relationship past might shape the experience and expression of emotions in his or her later romantic relationships. According to the ERM, emotions are experienced in relationships when expectations associated with important plans or goals are suddenly violated or disconfirmed. When plans or goals are completed or fulfilled more quickly or more easily than anticipated, individuals should experience positive emotions. Conversely, when important goals or plans are unexpectedly thwarted or blocked, negative emotions should ensue. Working models and experiences in relationships earlier in life might affect the types of interpersonal goals, plans, and expectancies that individuals have for later relationships can be facilitated or hindered.

People who have a history of secure relationships and working models may experience and express more positive and fewer negative emotions in their relationships for several reasons. As a starting point, they may be more willing to consider and
accommodate their partner’s preferences and desires, especially when they make important relationship-relevant decisions. Individuals who harbor more secure attachment representations usually work toward “goal-corrected partnerships” in which each partner’s most important needs and desires are considered before deciding which course of action would be best for the relationship rather than oneself (Simpson, 2007). Individuals who have more secure attachment histories also display more constructive, problem-focused interaction strategies (Pistole, 1989; Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996), make more benign attributions when partners engage in questionable behaviors (Collins, 1996), and more readily forgive their partner’s transgressions (cf. Johnson, 2004). By adopting and constructively working toward plans and goals that may be both more equitable and more relationship centered (e.g., MaxJoint outcomes; see Simpson, 2007), people who have secure attachment histories should be in a better position to facilitate and attain outcomes beneficial to both relationship partners. This could explain why they experience and express more positive emotions in their relationships; more secure persons may be more likely to establish and achieve shared plans and goals with their partners.

Individuals who have insecure relationship histories and working models, in contrast, experience and express less positive and more negative emotions in their relationships. These individuals should be less inclined to consider and accommodate their partner’s preferences and desires, perhaps due to concerns about having sufficient autonomy, control, and independence (by highly avoidant persons) or fears of being abandoned, taken advantage of, or failing to meet needs for felt security (by highly anxious persons). People who have insecure attachment representations may also be less motivated to forge goal-corrected partnerships (Simpson, 2007). The establishment of goal-corrected partnerships may be further hampered by the tendency of insecurely attached people to use dysfunctional interaction strategies (Pistole, 1989; Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996), make negative dispositional inferences about their partner’s questionable actions (Collins, 1996), and be less forgiving (cf. Johnson, 2004). Each of these tendencies should make insecure individuals less capable of facilitating and achieving mutually beneficial relationship outcomes, which could explain why they experience and express more negative emotions in their relationships; more insecure persons are less likely to facilitate and achieve shared plans and goals with their partners.

**Conclusions**

Bowlby (1980) argued that life’s strongest emotions arise during the development, maintenance, termination, and reformation of attachment relationships. He also surmised that vestiges of one’s interpersonal past should be systematically related to the emotional tenor of successive attachment relationships across the lifespan. We have highlighted one developmental pathway through which significant relationship experiences during the opening years of life are associated with the daily experience and behavioral expression of positive versus negative emotions in adult romantic relationships. The relationship past is meaningfully linked to the present
for many individuals, but linked through what has transpired in different types of relationships during intervening stages of social development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writing of this article was supported by National Institutes of Health Grant R01-MH40864 to Byron Egeland, L. Alan Sroufe, and W. Andrew Collins; by National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) Grant R01-MH49599 to Jeffry A. Simpson; and by NIMH Training Grant MH19893 to Katherine C. Haydon. The pioneering work of Egeland, Sroufe, and Elizabeth A. Carlson in the early phases of this longitudinal study is gratefully acknowledged.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1. The AAI is a semi-structured hour-long interview that asks questions about the respondent’s upbringing with his/her mother and father between the ages of 5–12. Most individuals are classified into one of three primary AAI categories. “Secure” individuals openly discuss both the positive and the negative aspects of their upbringing, they recount their earlier experiences coherently and in a reasonably detailed, non-defensive manner, and they seem to have forgiven their parents if major transgressions occurred in the past. “Preoccupied” individuals often discuss their childhoods at great length, usually displaying either excessive unresolved frustration or anger about their upbringing or discussing tangential issues that do not address the specific interview questions. “Dismissive” individuals either idealize their childhoods without providing specific details about good events from their childhoods that support their glowing memories, experience major memory blocks of childhood, or curtly dismiss the importance of attachment relationships altogether.

2. Only a small percentage of children are classified as “Disorganized” in the Strange Situation (Main and Solomon, 1990). Disorganization usually results from experiencing highly traumatic, fearful, or frightening events, often in connection with the primary caregiver. None of the 78 target participants in our longitudinal sample was classified as disorganized during childhood.
Happy and Close, but Sad and Effective? Affective Influences on Relationship Judgments and Behaviors

JOSEPH P. FORGAS

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INTRODUCTION

Affect is a defining feature of social relationships, and affective reactions often constitute the primary dimension in the way we react to other people (Fitness and Strongman, 1991; Forgas, 2002; Leary, 2000; Zajonc, 2000; see also Chapters 2 and 15 in this volume). Although the last two decades saw something akin to “affective revolution” in psychological research (see also Forgas, 2002, 2006), we are still a long way from fully understanding the age-old puzzle about the relationship between the rational and the emotional aspects of human nature (Hilgard, 1980). Nowhere is this link more important than in understanding relationship processes. This chapter seeks to review some recent lines of evidence suggesting that mild affective states or moods can have a significant influence on both the content and the process of how people think and behave in their personal relationships.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the historical background of research on affect and relationships and theories relevant to understanding this link. Then it describes a number of converging empirical research programs demonstrating affective influences on thinking and behaviour in relationships. This work may be readily subdivided into two complementary orientations:

1. Demonstrations of affect congruence, showing that affective states have a mood-congruent influence on the way people perceive and evaluate their relationships
2. Exploration of affective influences in information processing strategies, showing that affect is also closely involved in how people process relationship-relevant information

Negative mood in particular often triggers a more systematic, accommodative processing style that results in more effective and more successful judgments and behaviors in relationships.

Affect and Relationships

The key role of affect in the way people think about and cognitively represent social relationships has been illustrated by a number of early studies. For example, peoples’ implicit representations about common, recurring social encounters are largely determined by their feelings about these events, rather than the objective features of the encounters (Forgas, 1979, 1982). Affective reactions such as anxiety, confidence, feelings of intimacy, pleasure, or discomfort were critical in defining implicit representations of interactions with others. Similar conclusions were reached several decades ago by Pervin (1976, p. 471), who argued that what is striking is the extent to which interpersonal situations are “described in terms of affects (e.g. threatening, warm, interesting, dull, tense, calm, rejecting) and organized in terms of similarity of affects aroused by them.” Thus, reactions to interpersonal and relationship experiences seem to be predominantly determined by affective responses.
Affect seems to define not only perceptions of interpersonal encounters but also the way relationship scripts are perceived. Human social relationships characteristically conform to shared, culturally established patterns, and individuals from a given culture normally share an implicit cognitive representation of the range of relationship types practised in their milieu. In one study (Forgas and Dobosz, 1980), a representative range of relationship scripts was elicited in a free response study, and a second sample of subjects from the same milieu—university students—was then asked to make similarity judgments between the relationship scripts. Their responses were used as input to an individual differences multidimensional scaling analysis. Results showed three evaluative dimensions as defining the relationship space—(1) social desirability, (2) love and commitment, and (3) sexuality—again confirming the important role of feelings in perceptions of relationships types.

Affect also has a dynamic influence on how social information—including information about relationships—is selected, interpreted, processed, and remembered (Bower, 1981; Forgas, 1995a, 2001, 2002). Such affect infusion effects were initially explained in terms of either psychodynamic, or conditioning, associationist principles. Psychoanalytic theories assumed that affect has a dynamic, invasive quality and can take over judgments unless adequate psychological resources are deployed to control these impulses (Feshbach and Singer, 1957). Conditioning and associationist theories provided an alternative account, suggesting that previously neutral concepts can become affectively loaded as a result of incidental associations with affect-eliciting stimuli. According to radical behaviorists such as John Watson, all affective reactions acquired throughout life—including affective evaluations of the self—are the product of such a cumulative pattern of associations.

The conditioning metaphor was specifically applied to social relationships by Byrne and Clore (1970) and Clore and Byrne (1974), who suggested that affective states triggered by unrelated events can become attached to previously neutral responses toward partners. For example, an aversive environment can produce a negative affective reaction that can spontaneously become associated with a previously neutral partner encountered in this setting (Clore and Byrne, 1974). Unlike earlier psychoanalytic or associationist explanations, contemporary cognitive theories focus on the information processing mechanisms that allow affective states to influence both the content and the processes of thinking and judgments, as the following section demonstrates.

Cognitive Mechanisms of Affect Congruence in Relationship Judgments

Memory-Based Processes The associative network model by Bower (1981) proposed that affect and cognition are integrally linked within an associative network of mental representations. An affective state should thus selectively and automatically prime related thoughts and ideas that are more likely to be used in constructive cognitive tasks—for example, tasks that involve the perception and evaluation of one’s partner or relationship. In several experiments, Bower found
that social thinking is indeed subject to such an affect-congruent bias. For example, people who were induced to feel good (or bad) were likely to selectively remember positive (or negative) details of their childhood and their social activities during the preceding weeks, consistent with the predicted selective recall of affect-congruent information. The selective priming of affect-congruent information should in turn produce a mood congruent bias in the way social evaluations and judgments are constructed, as the following section shows (Forgas, 2002).

Such affect priming is subject to important boundary conditions (Bower and Forgas, 2001; Eich and Macauley, 2000; Forgas, 1995a). Affect congruity is more likely when the affective state is strong, salient, and self-relevant and when the task involves the constructive generation and elaboration of information rather than the simple reproduction of stored details. Thus, mood effects are most reliably found when the information is rich, complex, and involving, as is typically the case with relationship judgments (Forgas, 1994, 1999a, 1999b; Sedikides, 1995).

Misattribution Mechanisms  An alternative theory by Schwarz and Clore (1983) argued that “rather than computing a judgment on the basis of recalled features of a target, individuals may … ask themselves: ‘How do I feel about it?’ /and/ in doing so, they may mistake feelings due to a pre-existing state as a reaction to the target” (Schwarz, 1990, p. 529). This “how-do-I-feel-about-it” heuristic suggests that affect influences relationship judgments because of an inferential error: People misread their prevailing affective states as informative of their evaluations of their partners or relationships. This theory is similar to earlier conditioning models by Clore and Byrne (1974), also positing an incidental and subconscious link between affect and unrelated responses. Research now suggests that people only seem to rely on affect as a heuristic cue when they are unfamiliar with the task, have no prior evaluations to fall back on, their personal involvement is low, and have insufficient cognitive resources or motivation to compute a more thorough response (Forgas, 2006). Relationship judgments are rarely like this. Although affect-as-information may influence quick, superficial judgments (Forgas and Moylan, 1987; Schwarz and Clore, 1983), it is unlikely that relationship judgments would be based on such a superficial and truncated judgmental strategy.

Affective Influences on Information Processing Strategies

Affect can influence not only the content of thinking (influencing what people think) but also the process of cognition—that is, how people think. It was first thought that positive affect simply leads to more lazy, heuristic, and superficial processing strategies, whereas negative affect triggers a more effortful, systematic, analytic and vigilant processing style (Clark and Isen, 1982; Schwarz, 1990), due to motivational differences between happy and sad individuals. According to the mood-maintenance hypothesis (Clark and Isen, 1982), those in a positive mood avoid effortful thinking to maintain this pleasant state. In contrast, those in negative mood might engage in vigilant, effortful processing as an adaptive response to improve an aversive state. Others such as Schwarz (1990) and Wegener and
Petty (1994) offered a kind of functionalist cognitive tuning account, suggesting that positive and negative affect have a signalling/tuning function, informing the person of whether a relaxed, effort-minimizing (in positive affect) or a vigilant, effortful (negative affect) processing style is appropriate.

More recent theories, however, suggest a more subtle pattern (Bless, 2001; Bless and Fiedler, 2006; Fiedler, 2001). According to this view, the evolutionary significance of affective states is not simply to influence processing effort but also to trigger qualitatively different processing styles. Thus, positive affect recruits a more assimilative, schema-based, top-down processing style, as preexisting knowledge guides information processing. In contrast, negative affect produces a more accommodative, bottom-up, and externally focused processing strategy where attention to situational information drives thinking (Bless, 2001; Fiedler, 2001). These processing styles can be equally vigilant and effortful yet can produce qualitatively different outcomes. Much has been written about the beneficial effects of positive affect (Ciarrochi, Forgas, and Mayer, 2006; Forgas, 1998a,c). Much less is known about the adaptive advantages of dysphoria. Several experiments reported herein suggest that negative affect improves performance on tasks that require detailed attention to new, external information and may lead to more successful and adaptive relationship behaviors.

Toward an Integration: The Affect Infusion Model  An integrative theory, the Affect Infusion Model (AIM) (Forgas, 1995a, 2002) predicts that affect infusion should only occur in circumstances that promote an open, constructive processing style (Fiedler, 1991; Forgas, 1995b). The AIM thus assumes that (1) the extent and nature of affect infusion should be dependent on the kind of processing strategy that is used; and (2) all things being equal, people should use the least effortful and simplest processing strategy capable of producing a response. The model identifies four alternative processing strategies—direct access, motivated, heuristic, and substantive processing—which differ in terms of two basic dimensions: the degree of effort exerted in seeking a solution, and the degree of openness and constructiveness of the information search strategy. The combination of these two processing features—quantity (effort) and quality (openness)—produces four distinct processing styles (Fiedler, 2001): (1) substantive processing (high effort/open, constructive); (2) motivated processing (high effort/closed); (3) heuristic processing (low effort/open, constructive); and (4) direct access processing (low effort/closed).

The second and fourth of these strategies, direct access and motivated processing, involve highly targeted and predetermined patterns of information search and selection, strategies that limit the scope for incidental affect infusion. According to the model, mood congruence and affect infusion are only likely when constructive processing is used, such as substantive or heuristic processing (see also Fiedler, 1991, 2001). The AIM also specifies a range of contextual variables related to the task, the person, and the situation that jointly influence processing choices. An important feature of the AIM is that it recognizes that affect itself can also influence processing choices. The key predictions of the AIM are the absence of affect infusion when direct access or motivated processing is used and the presence of
affect infusion during heuristic and substantive processing. The following section discusses the implications of this model, which have now been supported in a number of the experiments.

HAPPY AND SATISFIED? AFFECT CONGRUENCE IN RELATIONSHIP JUDGMENTS

There are thus good theoretical reasons why fluctuating affective states can play an important role in relationship judgments and behaviors. Relationships contain an extremely rich array of information about both positive and negative experiences. Affective states may have a particularly strong influence on relationship judgments that recruit constructive, substantive processing (Forgas, 1995a, 2001; Sedikides, 1995).

Affective Influences on Perceiving Others

Perhaps the most fundamental relationship judgment in everyday life is the way we interpret a partner’s observed, ongoing social behaviors. As the meaning of social actions is often inherently ambiguous and equivocal (Heider, 1958), mood may selectively influence the interpretations we place on observed behaviors due to affect-priming effects. This prediction was first tested by inducing happy or sad affect in participants, who were then shown a videotape of their own social interactions with a partner from the previous day (Forgas, Bower, and Krantz, 1984). Participants were then asked to make a series of rapid, on-line judgments evaluating the observed behaviors of their partners as well as themselves.

There were significant affective distortions on these judgments. Happy subjects saw far more positive skilled behaviors than negative unskilled behaviors both in themselves and in their partners than did sad subjects. In contrast, observers who received no mood manipulation showed no such differences. These results establish that affect can have a fundamental influence on how people evaluate relationship behaviors, even when objective, videotaped evidence is readily available. These effects seem to occur because affect priming influences the kinds of interpretations and associations that people rely on to interpret intrinsically ambiguous social behaviors. For example, a smile that is seen as “friendly” in a good mood could be judged as “awkward” or “condescending” when the observer experiences negative affect. Talking about a recent trip by a partner may be seen as “clever” or “poised” when in good mood but might appear “boring” or “pretentious” when the observer is in a bad mood. It seems reasonable to assume that everyday relationship judgments made without the benefit of objective videotaped evidence may be even more affect sensitive than were judgments of videotaped encounters in our study.

In further studies (Forgas and Bower, 1987) we asked subjects to form impressions about other persons presented on a computer screen. Results showed that people spent more time reading and encoding mood-congruent information, providing direct evidence that affect exerts a mood-congruent influence on
encoding strategies. Just as happy subjects in our study spent longer focusing on the positive characteristics of another person, partners in a close relationship may well be subject to the same kind of affective bias. This pattern is generally consistent with the predictions of the mood-priming model, which assumes that the superior activation and availability of mood-related constructs should be reflected in slower and more detailed encoding of mood-consistent information. This occurs because by “spreading activation, a dominant emotion will enhance the availability of emotion-congruent interpretations and salience of congruent stimulus materials for learning” (Bower, 1981, p. 451). A richer associative base in turn may lead to the slower and more detailed processing of mood-consistent details in a learning task (Craik and Tulving, 1975).

**Affective Influences on Relationship Evaluations**

Thus, positive affect may improve and negative affect may impair the way people see their partners and personal relationships (Forgas, 2002). This was confirmed in a study of mood effects on relationship judgments when we (Forgas, Levinger, and Moylan, 1994) asked people who received positive or negative mood induction to directly evaluate their real-life intimate relationships. Two experiments found a significant mood-congruent influence on relationship judgments: Temporarily happy persons felt more content and satisfied with their relationships and partners, but sad persons felt more dissatisfied. Intuitively one might predict weaker mood effects as the longevity and familiarity of a relationship increases. In terms of the AIM, however, we expected and found undiminished mood effects even in long-term relationships, as long-term relationships provide partners with a particularly rich and varied range of both positive and negative experiences. Mood can thus play a critical role in selectively priming the kinds of details happy and sad people selectively recall and base their judgments on (ibid.).

**Affect and Attributions for Relationship Conflicts**

The way people explain conflicts has important consequences for the success and longevity of their relationships. In a series of experiments, we (Forgas, 1994, Exp. 1) asked participants who were induced to feel good or bad to make causal attributions for recent happy and conflict events in their current intimate relationships. Results showed significant mood congruence, with more self-blaming and pessimistic attributions by sad subjects than by happy subjects. In the next study attributions for simple versus complex relationship conflicts were compared (ibid., Exp. 2). Again, sad persons produced more negative, pessimistic attributions, identifying more internal, stable, and global causes for their conflicts than did happy subjects.

Surprisingly, these mood effects were much greater on explanations for serious rather than simple conflicts that required more substantive processing. A further experiment measuring processing latencies (Forgas, 1994, Exp. 3) confirmed that even with real, self-nominated relationship conflicts, mood influenced attributions. Further, attributions of responsibility for serious relationship conflicts (to do with,
e.g., sex, finances) were much more influenced by the partners’ prevailing mood state than were attributions about minor points of conflict (e.g., what channel to watch, which film to see). Consistent with the AIM, greater mood effects were associated with longer processing latencies, and it is this extended processing recruited by serious conflicts that produced increased mood congruence in the resulting judgments. Thus, affect is likely to infuse even highly involving relationship judgments, as long as open, constructive thinking is required, and explaining difficult, intractable relationship problems in our lives may be even more influenced by temporary moods than are simple snap judgments about unproblematic issues (ibid.).

**Motivational Effects: Elimination of Affect Congruence in Relationship Decisions**

The Affect Infusion Model also predicts that affect congruence may be eliminated or reversed when people have reason to adopt a motivated processing style, and negative affect itself may be crucial in triggering motivated processing in relationship decisions. Schachter (1959) was among the first to show that anxious or frightened people selectively prefer the company of others in a similar predicament, in an apparent motivated effort to control negative affect. Other evidence also suggests that people prefer to interact with partners who are in a matching rather than different mood (Locke and Horowitz, 1990). In a further exploration of mood-induced motivated processing in relationship decisions, happy or sad persons were asked to select a partner either for themselves or for another person. As expected, the combination of sad mood and a self-relevant task led to a highly motivated processing strategy, as people selectively looked for and found a rewarding companion (Forgas, 1989; 1991, Exp. 1). In later work, descriptions about potential partners were provided on a series of information cards (Forgas, 1991, Exp. 2) or on a computer file, allowing the step-by-step analysis of each person’s decision path and reaction latencies in selecting a partner (ibid., Exp. 3). Those in a sad mood when making a self-relevant choice again selectively searched for and found rewarding partners, reached such decisions faster, but studied motivationally relevant details at greater length and remembered them better later on. As predicted by the AIM, there was no evidence for affect congruence in these motivated judgments. In summary, affect seems to have a strong mood-congruent influence on many relationship judgments, but only when open and constructive processing is used, and there are no motivational forces influencing the outcome.

**Affective Influences on Strategic Communication and Self-Disclosure**

Self-disclosure is one of the most important influences on relationship progression. The ability to disclose intimate information about ourselves is an essential skill in establishing intimate relationships and is also critical to mental health and social adjustment (Forgas, 1985). Inappropriate self-disclosure can lead to adverse evaluations by others and, ultimately, to relationship breakdown and social isolation.
Does temporary mood influence people’s self-disclosure strategies? Recent studies suggest that affect has a significant influence on verbal communication in interpersonal tasks that are characterised by psychological ambiguity. For example, positive mood tends to prime a more optimistic, confident, direct requesting style, and negative mood leads to more cautious, polite requests (Forgas, 1999a, 1999b). Further, mood effects on verbal requests are much stronger when the request situation is demanding and difficult and thus requires more extensive, substantive processing. Even in a realistic face-to-face encounter, those in a negative mood were more polite, hesitant, and delayed in making their requests much longer than did control—happy—persons.

Affective states were found to play an important role in elaborately planned interpersonal encounters such as bargaining and negotiating encounters (Forgas, 1998c). People in a positive mood formed more positive and optimistic attitudes about the bargaining task and used more optimistic, cooperative and integrative negotiating strategies. These findings suggest that slight changes in affect may influence the way people communicate in their social relationships.

In other experiments, we (Forgas, 2007) explored the effects of mood on self-disclosure strategies. People feeling good or bad after watching affectively charged videotapes were asked to indicate the order in which they would feel comfortable disclosing increasingly intimate information about themselves to a partner. We found a significant tendency for happy people to select more intimate topics to disclose than did sad people. Of course, these effects occurred in a highly artificial, simulated context, so in a subsequent experiment we asked participants to interact with another person in a neighboring room through a computer keyboard. In fact, the computer was preprogrammed to respond in standard ways that indicated either consistently high or low levels of self-disclosure. Results again showed that individuals induced to feel good preferred more intimate disclosure, but only when the partner was also disclosing either consistently or increasingly intimate information. Positive mood did not increase the intimacy of self-disclosure when the partner was not disclosing. Happy persons also formed more positive impressions of the partner consistent with the predicted overall mood-congruent pattern (Forgas, 2001).

Why do these effects occur? When facing an unpredictable social encounter, people need to rely on constructive processing to guide their interpersonal strategies. Affect can selectively prime more affect-congruent thoughts and associations, ultimately influencing strategic decisions about self-disclosure. Happy persons disclose more because they form more confident and optimistic impressions and behavioral strategies. However, these mood effects disappear when the interaction partner does not match disclosure intimacy. Self-disclosure is a risky process; whether we undertake it depends on a constructive assessment of the situation. Affectively primed optimism or pessimism influences the outcome as is the case when people formulate interpersonal requests or plan and execute negotiations (Forgas, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b).
In addition to producing affect congruence, affective states can also influence the way information is processed. Although much attention has been paid to the beneficial consequences of positive affect, suggesting that feeling good promotes creativity, flexibility, cooperation, integrative thinking, relationship satisfaction, and a host of other desirable outcomes (Ciarrochi et al., 2006; Forgas, 1994, 2002), this is only part of the story. In this section we shall see that negative affect may also produce desirable and beneficial consequences. Even though negative affect is clearly bothersome and provides no hedonic benefit, it remains one of the most enduring and common affective states (Ciarrochi, Forgas, and Mayer, 2006). Forgas (2007) argued recently that negative affect sometimes operates as a signal spontaneously triggering more detailed and accommodative thinking strategies that appear to be highly adaptive to the requirements of demanding social situations. For example, negative affect produces a thinking style that helps reduce certain judgmental biases (Forgas, 2007b) and that promotes more successful social influence strategies (Forgas, in press).

Negative Affect Reduces Judgmental Errors

Interpreting the behavior of our partners is often subject to the fundamental attribution error (FAE) or correspondence bias, when people see intentionality and internal causation despite evidence for the influence of situational forces (Gilbert and Malone, 1995). The FAE occurs because people pay disproportionate attention to salient and conspicuous information—the actor—and fail to process information about situational constraints (Gilbert, 1991). If the detailed processing of situational information is facilitated, for example, by a negative mood, the incidence of the FAE and other judgmental biases may be reduced (Forgas, 1998b; see also Chapter 6 in this volume). In one experiment, happy or sad participants read and made attributions about the writer of an essay advocating a popular or unpopular position (for or against nuclear testing) that they were told was either assigned or was freely chosen using the procedure pioneered by Jones and Harris (1967). Happy mood increased, and sad mood reduced the incidence of the FAE, consistent with the more attentive thinking style recruited by negative affect. Similar effects can also occur in real life. In a field study, participants who were feeling good or bad after seeing happy or sad movies read and make attributions about the writers of popular and unpopular essays arguing for or against recycling (cf. Forgas and Moylan, 1987). Once again, negative mood reduced the FAE.

Are these effects indeed due to the more attentive processing of situational information in negative mood? To test this, happy or sad participants made attributions based on freely chosen or coerced essays advocating popular or unpopular positions (for or against environmentalism; Forgas, 1998b, Exp. 3). Once again, negative mood significantly reduced the incidence of the FAE, especially when the essays advocated unpopular positions. Recall memory data confirmed that those
in a negative mood remembered significantly more information than did others, consistent with the predicted association between mood and the more attentive processing of the stimulus information. Thus, mild negative affect improved judgmental accuracy and reduced the incidence of the fundamental attribution error both in laboratory and in real-life settings. These effects are consistent with the suggested evolutionary benefits of negative affect in recruiting more accommodative processing styles.

Mood Affects on Interpersonal Accuracy

How do we know if the information we receive from our partner is accurate? Accepting invalid information as true (false positives, excessive gullibility) can be just as dangerous as rejecting information that is valid (false negatives, excessive scepticism). Credibility judgments can be crucial in relationships. Accepting or rejecting interpersonal messages that are by their very nature ambiguous and not open to objective validation may be subject to affect-induced differences in information processing style. Negative moods might produce more critical and sceptical judgments, while happy people may accept interpersonal messages at face value, as if they were genuine and trustworthy. In one experiment, we asked happy and sad participants to judge the genuineness of people displaying positive, neutral, and negative facial expressions. As predicted, those in a negative mood were significantly less likely to accept facial expressions as genuine than those in the neutral or happy condition. Curiously, happy participants were more confident in their judgment about the genuineness of the facial expressions than were the other groups. In another study instead of positive and negative facial displays, the six basic emotions were used as targets (i.e. anger, fear, disgust, happiness, surprise and sadness). Once again, negative mood reduced, and positive mood increased people’s tendency to accept the facial displays as genuine, which is consistent with the more attentive and accommodative processing style associated with negative moods.

In another study (East and Forgas, 2007) we asked happy or sad participants to accept or reject the videotaped statements of people who were interrogated after a staged theft and were either guilty or not guilty. Those in a positive mood were more likely to accept deceptive statements as truthful. Sad participants made significantly more guilty judgments and were significantly better at correctly detecting deception. Negative affect thus produced a significant advantage at accurately distinguishing truths from lies in the observed interviews. A signal detection analysis also confirmed that sad judges were more accurate in detecting deception (identifying guilty targets as guilty) than were neutral or happy judges, consistent with the predicted mood-induced processing differences.

The Benefits of Negative Affect for Strategic Behaviors in Relationships

Could negative affect also improve interpersonal communication strategies, such as the production of persuasive messages? It was expected that accommodative processing promoted by negative affect should produce more concrete and factual thinking and result in the production of superior persuasive messages. In one
experiment (Forgas, in press, Exp. 1), participants received an audiovisual mood induction and were then asked to produce persuasive arguments for or against an increase in student fees, and Aboriginal land rights. Those in a negative mood produced arguments that were of significantly higher quality and more persuasive and concrete than those produced by happy participants. A mediational analysis showed that it was mood-induced variations in argument concreteness that influenced argument quality. In a further experiment, happy or sad participants produced persuasive arguments for or against Australia becoming a republic and for or against a radical right-wing party. Sad mood again resulted in higher quality and more persuasive arguments, consistent with the prediction that negative mood should promote a more careful, systematic, bottom-up processing style (Bless, 2001; Bless and Fiedler, 2006; Fiedler, 2001; Forgas, 2002).

Were the arguments produced by sad participants indeed more effective in persuading a person? To test this, in Experiment 3 the arguments produced by happy or sad participants earlier were presented to a naïve audience of undergraduate students. Observed changes in attitudes against a baseline measure taken earlier showed that arguments written by negative mood participants in Experiments 1 and 2 were actually significantly more successful in producing a real change in attitudes than were arguments produced by happy participants.

Finally, in Experiment 4 persuasive attempts by happy and sad people were directed at a partner to volunteer for a boring experiment using e-mail exchanges (Forgas, in press). The motivation to be persuasive was also manipulated by offering some of them a significant reward if successful (movie passes). Mood again had a significant effect on argument quality: People in a negative mood produced higher quality persuasive arguments than did the neutral group, who in turn did better than the positive group. However, the offer of a reward reduced mood effects on argument quality, confirming a key prediction of the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995a, 2002): that mood effects on information processing—and subsequent social influence strategies—are strongest in the absence of motivated processing. A mediational analysis again confirmed that negative mood induced more accommodative thinking and more concrete and specific arguments, as predicted.

This series of experiments thus confirms that persuasive arguments produced in negative mood are not only of higher quality as judged by raters but are also significantly more effective in producing genuine attitude change in people. However, when motivation to be effective is already high, mood effects tend to diminish, as predicted by the Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 2002). These results are consistent with other studies suggesting that negative affect typically promotes a more concrete, accommodative processing style (Forgas, 1998b; Forgas, Vargas, and Laham, 2005) that produces direct benefits when it comes to the effective use of social influence strategies, such as the production of persuasive arguments. This finding may have interesting applied implications for managing successful relationships and resolving personal conflicts, tasks that also involve a great deal of persuasive communication, often in situations that are affectively charged. It is an intriguing possibility that mild negative affect may actually promote a more concrete, accommodative, and, ultimately, more successful communication style in intimate relationships.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The evidence outlined in this chapter suggests that affect has an important and multifaceted influence on thinking and behavior in relationships (Bradbury and Fincham, 1987). We saw that affective reactions play a crucial role in the organization and implicit representation of social encounters and relationship types. Affect was also found to have a significant mood congruent influence on social judgments and interpersonal decisions and attributions in relationships. Finally, affective influences on information processing strategies can have important consequences on how people process relationship relevant information.

Close relationships are characterized by the richness and variability of the shared knowledge between the partners, and frequently the same event or behavior is understood and interpreted by the partners very differently, despite their extensive shared knowledge of each other and the context (Fletcher and Fincham, 1991; see also Chapters 6 and 7 in this volume). It is the very richness and elaborateness of relationship information that makes mood effects particularly likely, as even a minor selective priming of positive and negative memory-based information may have large consequences for what is remembered and used in forming a judgment. This is a phenomenon often observed in marriage counseling, and one of its underlying causes may well be the different feelings elicited by the same situation in two different people.

The studies outlined here indicate that affective states also have a potentially crucial influence on information storage and retrieval and on social judgments, decisions, and attributions. Critical decisions and judgments about a relationship or one’s partner are more likely to be lenient and positive when a person is in a positive mood state and more likely to be negative or critical when the judge is in a dysphoric mood. These affect-infusion effects influence not only relationship evaluation and judgments but also impact on strategic interpersonal behaviors such as self-disclosure. Several of the experiments described here found that affect can influence the way people monitor and interpret their social encounters, the way they formulate and respond to requests, the way they plan and execute strategic negotiations, and the way they communicate intimate information about themselves (Forgas, 1998b, 1998c, 1999a, 1999b). In contrast, as predicted by the AIM, affect infusion tends to be absent whenever a social cognitive task is performed using a highly motivated strategy. The processing effects of negative mood described here seem particularly intriguing, since these studies suggest that mild dysphoria could actually improve cognitive strategies and even result in superior interpersonal strategies (Forgas, in press).

Although much has been discovered about the information processing and representational functions of affective states in relationships, not enough of this evidence has so far come from research directly concerned with close relationships. This is all the more unfortunate as close relationships are particularly promising as an ecologically valid research domain concerning the links between affect and cognition. Given the growing sophistication of the theories and methods now employed in research looking at the interface of affect and cognition, the
time seems ripe to apply these strategies to the investigation of the role of affect in real-life personal relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by a Special Investigator award from the Australian Research Council and the Research Prize by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation to Joseph P. Forgas. For further information on this research project, see also http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/users/jforgas.htm.

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Approach and Avoidance Motivation in Close Relationships

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Laughter is the closest distance between two people.

Victor Borge

My toughest fight was with my first wife.

Muhammad Ali
Close relationships can be the source of incredible joy, but they can also be the source of profound pain. The incentives in relationships are many, including affection, laughter, intimacy, love, and companionship. What has been long understood by the public and increasingly documented by science is that the rewards in relationships are quite beneficial to health and well-being. For example, when asked what gives their lives purpose and meaning, people often put relationships at the top of their list (Klinger, 1977; Little, 1989), and when asked to look back across their lives, people cite close friends and family relationships as a significant source of their happiness (Sears, 1977). Similarly, in a study of more than 2,000 Americans, Campbell and colleagues (1976) found that marriage and family life were the best predictors of overall life satisfaction. It also seems that good close relationships are a necessary condition for great happiness; as Diener and Seligman (2002) found when looking at the happiest people (i.e., the top 10% of the sample using multiple converging reports), the one thing they all had in common was that they had strong positive social relationships. In addition to the ties between relationship quality and mental health, there are the ties between relationship quality and physical health. For example, in a review of more than 80 published studies, Uchino, Cacioppo, and Kiecolt-Glaser (1996) found a robust association between positive social ties and physiological markers of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems.

The threats in relationships, however, are almost equal in number, such as conflict, rejection, competition, jealousy, and grief. Also long understood by laypersons and the research community is that the harsh features of relationships are detrimental to health and well-being. More than half of people seeking psychotherapy cite some type of problems with relationships as a reason for beginning treatment (Pinsker et al., 1985). The possibility of rejection or negative evaluation from others and negative emotional exchanges between relationship partners have been repeatedly associated with heightened activity in physiological stress systems, such as increased cortisol production (Dickerson and Kemeny, 2004) and ambulatory blood pressure (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2003). We also know that ostracism by either a group or a close relationship partner is a severe source of emotional distress and pain, as outlined in Chapter 18 in this volume. Also discussed in Chapter 16 in this volume, relationships can also pose a direct threat to physical health through the violence enacted by intimate partners.

In short, social relationships are thick with potential rewards and potential punishments. Despite the ubiquitous presence of both incentives and threats in interpersonal relationships, across the life span people are nevertheless motivated to form and maintain strong and stable social bonds; failing to do so is linked with higher mortality and lower health and well-being (e.g., Baumeister and Leary, 1995; House, Landis, and Umberson, 1988). Yet surprisingly little work has investigated the processes involved in establishing, maintaining, and dissolving social bonds from a motivational or goal theory perspective. A long-standing distinction in the field of motivation is the focus of motives and goals. Motives and goals can be focused on a rewarding, desired end state (approach), or they can be focused on a punishing, undesired end state (avoidance). This distinction seems particularly
appropriate for understanding how people simultaneously regulate social incentives and social threats. Previous research on motivation in other domains (e.g., achievement, power) has also shown that the approach–avoidance distinction is fundamental and yields important insights, such as the finding that avoidance motives and goals are often (but not always) associated with less effective regulation and poorer outcomes (e.g., Elliot and Sheldon, 1998).

Much of the work on social relationships has failed to simultaneously examine processes involved in obtaining rewards (e.g., laughter) and processes involved in averting punishments (e.g., conflict). Because interpersonal relationships consistently present both threats and incentives, it is imperative to simultaneously address the approach dimension and the avoidance dimension. Implicit in this perspective is the recognition that the presence of incentives is not the same as the absence of threats, nor is the presence of threats the same as the absence of incentives. In other words, the approach and avoidance systems are largely independent of one another, and a person’s behavior can be driven by either or both types of motives and goals. Finally, there is also growing evidence that interpersonal goals have a far greater influence on cognition, emotion, and behavior than previously anticipated. That is, recent research shows that close relationship goals affect numerous psychological processes in seemingly unrelated domains, and often without our explicit knowledge of their power. For example, Shah (2003) found that priming goals related to significant others affected goal pursuit for, and performance on, an unrelated achievement task; the effect was moderated by one’s closeness to the significant other. In the remainder of this chapter I attempt to integrate ideas from the historically distinct fields of close relationships and motivation and to present evidence that an approach–avoidance perspective holds promise for furthering our understanding of both motivation and social relationships.

APPRAOCH AND AVOIDANCE MOTIVATION: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE

The distinction between approach and avoidance motives and goals has a long and prolific history in psychological theory and research (for reviews see Elliot, 1999; Higgins, 1998). Pavlov (1927) described two reflexes, one orienting an organism toward a stimulus and the other turning the organism away from a stimulus. In a comprehensive comparative review, Schneirla (1959) found evidence for this “towardness” and “awayness” distinction across diverse species, suggesting evolutionarily early phylogenetic roots. Miller’s (1959) classic research on separate approach and withdrawal learning processes and graphical representations of their interplay in approach and avoidance conflict gradients provides another early example.

Several contemporary theories of motivation and goal processes have featured the approach and avoidance distinction. In particular, Jeffrey Gray’s (1987) work has generated considerable attention. Gray posited distinct appetitive and aversive motivational systems, referred to as the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), respectively. Gray’s model outlines
personality as a function of individual differences in the two systems (thought to have neuroanatomical correlates). The appetitive system (BAS) activates behavior in response to signals of reward and nonpunishment, whereas the aversive system (BIS) inhibits behavior in response to signals of punishment, nonreward, and novel stimuli. Gray’s (1990) theory also links motivation to emotion: BAS is associated with feelings of hope and approach behaviors, whereas activation of the BIS is associated with feelings of anxiety and avoidance behaviors (Gray, 1990).

Several other theories of motivation and regulatory processes have implicitly or explicitly made the distinction between approach and avoidance dimensions. For example, in his theory of regulatory focus, Higgins (1998) distinguished between the regulation of behavior that is focused on positive end states and self-regulation of behavior that is focused on negative end states, referring to the former as a promotion focus and the latter as a prevention focus. Carver and Scheier’s (1990) model of self-regulation is based on a feedback process in which information from the environment is compared to an internal reference. Some feedback processes attempt to reduce the discrepancy between the input and the internal reference (discrepancy-reducing loops), and some feedback processes attempt to enlarge this discrepancy (discrepancy-enlarging loops). In the domain of achievement, Elliot (1997) described approach motives and goals as those consisting of the need for achievement and avoidance motives as those focused on a fear of failure.

One reason the approach and avoidance distinction has been so prevalent throughout the years is because it has important implications for understanding perception, cognition, emotion, behavior, health, and well-being (e.g., Derryberry and Reed, 1994; Elliot and Sheldon, 1998; Higgins, Shah, and Friedman, 1997). For example, Derryberry and Reed (1994) found that individuals with strong approach motives were biased toward cues indicating gain, and those with strong avoidance motives were biased toward negative cues indicating loss in a basic visual target detection task. Higgins and colleagues (1997) showed that promotion-focused goals produce cheerfulness-dejection responses (success = cheerful; failure = dejection) and prevention-focused goals produce quiescence-agitation responses (success = quiescence; failure = agitation). And Elliot and Sheldon (1998) found that higher numbers of avoidance personal goals predicted lower well-being and greater physical symptom reports, both prospectively and retrospectively.

Another reason the approach and avoidance distinction has consistently emerged in motivation—as well as in other areas in psychology (e.g., Gable, Reis, and Elliot, 2003)—may stem from the biological distinction made by Mother Nature, which has been increasingly documented by science. For example, Sutton and Davidson (1997) found that Gray’s (1990) BIS and BAS constructs predicted different components of resting prefrontal asymmetry as measured with electroencephalographic (EEG) technology. Higher BAS was associated with more relative left prefrontal activation, whereas higher BIS scores were associated with greater relative right prefrontal activation. Other researchers have induced emotions in the laboratory and measured corresponding neural activity with the EEG. Anticipation of a reward corresponds with left frontal activation, and anticipation of a punishment is associated with right frontal activation (Sobotka, Davidson, and Senulis, 1992). Finally, Reuter and colleagues (2004) found that BAS sensitivity
was associated with hippocampus-parahippocampus activity in the left hemisphere in response to erotic stimuli, and high BIS subjects showed increased activity in several areas of the brain when exposed to fear and disgust images.

The research indicates that motives to approach incentives are largely independent from motives to avoid threats. This relative independence means that the two systems may influence outcomes through different processes. For example, Gable, Reis, and Elliot (2000) examined individual differences in approach and avoidance motives (as measured by BAS and BIS) and reactions to daily events. They found that individuals with high BAS sensitivity scores reported experiencing more frequent positive events (differential exposure) than those with lower BAS scores and, consequently, also reported more daily positive affect. When positive events did occur (i.e., controlling for frequency) BAS did not predict changes in positive emotion. Those high on BIS sensitivity reported more daily negative affect, and those with scores did not report experiencing more frequent or more important negative events than those with lower BIS scores; however, high BIS was associated with experiencing more negative emotion when negative events did occur (differential reactivity). This research suggests that although approach and avoidance motives are both associated with important outcomes (e.g., daily emotional experience), they may influence those outcomes via different routes.

What hopefully is clear from this review is that the approach–avoidance distinction has a long history that is bolstered by contemporary empirical support. Indeed, recent advances in neuroscience have only confirmed long held notions regarding neural-anatomical roots. What may not be as clear though is that the approach–avoidance distinction has not been examined in the specific domain of social relationships nearly as well as in the achievement domain and with domain nonspecific motives and goals. However, there has been some work on social motivation in this context, which is reviewed in the following section.

**SOCIAL MOTIVATION: AFFILIATION AND INTIMACY MOTIVES**

Interest in social motives has waxed and waned over the years. Early work by Henry Murray included several social needs (e.g., sex, nurturance) in the list of universal needs, but the need for affiliation by far received the most attention. Shipley and Veroff (1952) compared control groups with those who were threatened with rejection or separation from a group (e.g., a fraternity) to develop a measure of the strength of the need for affiliation (nAff). The narrow basis (i.e., threat of rejection) for nAff was expanded by Atkinson, Heyns, and Veroff (1954) to include themes of establishing and maintaining positive feelings in relationships with others. They speculated that there were actually two types of need for affiliation: one aroused in conditions of rejection or separation threats and one aroused in conditions of potential positive affiliation outcomes.

DeCharms (1957) then created a measure that included separate scores for approach affiliation (+Aff) and avoidance affiliation (–Aff). He found that –Aff was
positively correlated with productivity in competitive groups and negatively correlated with productivity in cooperative groups. However, this new measure was still based on the original experiment by Shipley and Veroff (1952) that defined affiliation as a concern with rejection and separation. Moreover, all of the work on social motivation conducted up to this point was done so from the theoretical point of view of Murray's (1938) deficit model of needs or Miller's (1959) drive reduction theory of conflict. Boyatzis (1973) contended that an approach affiliation motive did not conform to these models of needs. Specifically, he reasoned that the existence of close relationships would not decrease approach affiliation motives, which would be predicted from deficit or drive reduction models. Rather, he thought that obtaining positive incentives in relationships would stimulate more approach motivation.

Also breaking from the narrow definition of affiliation motivation being based on concerns with rejection, evaluation, or separation, Mehrabian (1976) described two social motives: a sensitivity to rejection (avoidance) and an affiliative tendency (approach). This work was based on expectancy theories, and sensitivity to rejection was hypothesized to stem from expectations of negative social reinforcers whereas the affiliative tendency was hypothesized to stem from expectation of positive social reinforcers. Mehrabian found that people high on affiliative tendency were less anxious and more confident, elicited more positive affect from others, and saw themselves as similar to others compared with those low on affiliative tendency. People high in sensitivity to rejection were less confident and were judged less positively by others than people low on sensitivity to rejection.

Although the majority of work on social motivation has focused on affiliation or rejection motives, there has been some work by McAdams (1982) on intimacy motivation. He described intimate interactions as those that had mutual pleasure, openness, and reciprocal dialogue. Intimacy motivation has been positively associated with frequencies of interpersonal thoughts and positive emotions in interpersonal situations and negatively associated with desire to be alone during interpersonal interactions (McAdams and Constantian, 1983). Intimacy motivation has also been associated with self-disclosure to friends, listening behavior, and concern for the well-being of friends (McAdams, Healy, and Krause, 1984). Intimacy motivation seems particularly important for the study of existing close relationships; however, it has not been examined from an approach and avoidance perspective.

In sum, there is a respectable body of literature examining social motives, albeit much smaller than the body of literature devoted to achievement motives. Much of this previous work did not explicitly examine both approach and avoidance social motives. The lack of attention to approach and avoidance social motivation is likely a large oversight for many reasons, not the least of which is the recent evidence for the existence of neurobiological circuitry for social motivational/attachment reward and threat systems in mammals and humans (e.g., Depue and Morrone-Strapinksy, 2005; Insel, 2000; Panksepp, 1998). In the remainder of this chapter I describe a new hierarchical model of approach and avoidance social motivation. I also present recent evidence in support of this model and, most importantly, an outline of topics that are in need of empirical attention.
The Basic Model

In Gable (2006), I presented a model of approach and avoidance social motives and goals. The model is depicted in Figure 13.1. The model outlines how dispositional individual differences (i.e., social motives), environmental factors, and short-term strivings (i.e., social goals) influence social behaviors and social outcomes. The model is hierarchical because dispositional approach social motives and incentives in the social environment are hypothesized to combine to lead people to be more likely to adopt short-term approach social goals and how dispositional avoidance social motives and threats in the social environment are hypothesized to combine to lead people to be more likely to adopt avoidance social goals. For example, in a discussion on household finances, a husband who has strong approach social motives and recently has had several enjoyable interactions with his wife will be likely to adopt approach goals, such as, “I want to us to have a pleasant discussion and for both of us to be satisfied with the outcome,” whereas a husband who has strong avoidance motives and recently has experienced friction with his wife will be likely to adopt avoidance goals, such as, “I want to avoid an argument and for neither of us to be resentful of the outcome.” Or, upon meeting a potential dating partner, a person who has strong approach social motives or who finds himself or herself in an environment rich with dating opportunities will be likely to adopt approach goals, such as, “I want to get to know this person and make a good impression,” whereas someone who has strong aversive motives or finds himself or herself in a hostile and competitive dating environment will be likely to adopt avoidance goals, such as, “I don’t want to be rejected or make a fool of myself.”

As outlined in the model, approach and avoidance goals should be associated with different social outcomes. Approach social goals should be strongly associated with outcomes defined by the presence of rewarding social bonds, such as affiliation, companionship, and intimacy. Avoidance social goals should be
strongly associated with outcomes defined by the presence or absence of punishing social bonds, such as rejection, insecurity, and conflict. That is, individuals who have strong approach motives and goals (or find themselves in an incentive-rich social milieu), define successful interactions and relationships as those that provide incentives (e.g., fun, companionship, and understanding), and painful relationships are defined as those that fail to provide these rewards. Individuals who have strong avoidance motives (or find themselves in a high-threat social environment) define positive interactions and relationships as those that lack threats (e.g., uncertainty, disagreements, and anxiety), and painful relationships are defined as those that possess these negative qualities. The final aspect of the model is that social outcomes (incentives and threats) combine to form global evaluations of the social network and relationship quality.

Recent work has provided evidence for the model. In a series of studies Gable (2006) found that distal social motives predicted more proximal goals, supporting the hierarchical nature of social motivation. Specifically, people with strong approach social motives, such as hope for affiliation were more likely to adopt short-term approach social goals, such as, “I want to make friends” and “I want to spend more quality time with my partner.” People with strong avoidance social motives, such as fear of rejection, were more likely to adopt short-term avoidance social goals, such as, “I don’t want to be lonely” and “I want to avoid upsetting my partner.” Also as predicted by the model shown in Figure 13.1, approach and avoidance motives and goals were associated with different patterns of social outcomes. Specifically, strong approach goals predicted less loneliness, greater well-being, and more satisfying relationships, concurrently and over time, and strong avoidance goals predicted more loneliness, greater anxiety about relationships, and more physical symptoms, concurrently and over time (Elliot, Gable, and Mapes, 2006; Gable, 2006). In addition, the effects of social goals are better predictors of social outcomes than general sensitivity to reward and punishment (i.e., BIS/BAS; Gable, 2006).

The research just summarized assessed an array of social relationships that individuals were engaged in at a given time (e.g., friends, family, romantic partners). Other work has focused on the influence of approach and avoidance social goals in a particular close relationship. For example, approach and avoidance motives for everyday sacrifice (i.e., enacting a behavior that is not preferred, such as going to a movie of your partner’s choice or skipping a night out with friends to help your partner paint a room) in dating couples were examined in a daily experience study with a longitudinal follow-up (Impett, Gable, and Peplau, 2005). Approach motives for sacrifice (e.g., to promote intimacy) were positively associated with personal and relationship well-being, whereas avoidance motives for sacrifice (e.g., to avoid conflict) were negatively associated with personal well-being and positively associated with conflict. Strong avoidance motives for sacrifice also predicted relationship dissolution two months later. Also interesting was the finding that when people thought their partners were making sacrifices for avoidance motives, their personal well-being and relationship satisfaction declined.

In short, there is empirical support for the links between distal social motives and more proximal social goals and the links between these motives and goals.
and social outcomes. There is also preliminary evidence that approach goals are associated with outcomes characterized by the presence of incentives and that avoidance are associated with outcomes characterized by the absence of threats. There remains much work to be done on other aspects of the model. For example, the links between the conditions of the current social environment and social goals has not been examined. Investigation of environmental incentives and threats is important as we know from work on Interdependence Theory (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959) and the Investment Model (Rusbult, 1980) that stresses the role that factors that exist outside of the current dyadic relationship, such as alternatives to the relationship, are critical to understanding relationship processes. And, as outlined in Chapter 9 in the current volume, alternative forms of the current relationship can be part of this environment. However, because the empirical work has not yet tackled the role of incentives and threats in the current model, I focus now on understanding the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that mediate the links between social motives and goals and social outcomes. Processes that are likely candidates for mediators are described in the following section.

**Mediating Processes**

As mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter, because approach and avoidance motives/goals are largely independent of one another, the processes that link them to social outcomes can be different. That is, the processes mediating the link between approach goals and intimacy might be different from the processes mediating the links between avoidance goals and security, for example. Thus far, most of the work on the processes mediating the links between social goals and social outcomes such as relationship satisfaction, loneliness, and social anxiety has focused on social events. These studies have found that people with strong avoidance motives and goals rated negative social events, such as disagreements with a partner and criticism from a friend, as more important than the same events for people with weaker avoidance motives and goals, and they reacted with more negative emotions when these events occurred (Elliot, Gable, and Mapes, 2006; Gable, 2006; Gable, Reis, and Elliot, 2000). However, avoidance motives and goals have not been consistently associated with how many negative social events people experience (Gable, 2006; Gable, Elliot, and Reis, 2000). In contrast, individuals who have strong approach motives and goals consistently report experiencing a greater number of number of positive social events, such as going out to eat with a partner and being complimented by a friend, than those with weaker approach motives and goals. Finally, approach goals do not predict how important positive social events are rated, nor do approach goals predict how much positive affect is experienced when positive events do occur (Elliot, Gable, and Mapes, 2006; Gable, 2006; Gable, Reis, and Elliot, 2000). Taken as a whole, these results suggest that avoidance goals are associated with outcomes primarily through a process of increased reactivity to social threats, whereas approach goals are associated with outcomes primarily through a process of increased exposure to social incentives. What other processes might mediate the links between social motives and goals? And what specific perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes account for
differences in reactivity and exposure? Possible answers to these questions constitute the remainder of this chapter. Specifically, five candidates for mediating processes are discussed.

**Attention** Prior to responding to social incentives and threats, individuals must first attend to them. For example, some people seem to easily notice a smiling face in a crowd, whereas others are more apt to recognize a fleeting disapproving glance. Also as detailed in Chapter 19 in this volume, there are individual differences in the tendency to attend to alternatives to one’s current romantic relationship in the environment, such as other mates. Biases in attention have long been of interest to psychologists, and research on general approach and avoidance motivation has shown that individual differences in these motives predict biases toward rewarding and threatening stimuli, respectively. For example, Avila and Paracet (2002) showed that participants higher in BAS (compared with those low in BAS) were more attentive to targets when they were primed with a positive incentive cue than no cue. Studies have also shown that high trait anxiety is associated with increased attention to threatening cues (MacLeod and Mathews, 1988).

In our lab we have recently begun to employ methods developed to test attention biases. One technique used to study links between anxiety and attention is the Dot-Probe Task. In this task a threatening word and a neutral word are simultaneously presented on a computer screen. After a 500 ms delay a dot appears where one of the words previously was located, and participants press a key indicating the dot’s location. Anxious people are faster at responding to the dot when it appears in the threatening word space than in the neutral word space, whereas nonanxious people do not show this bias (MacLeod and Mathews, 1988). Our lab employed a variation of the Dot-Probe task that used human facial images displaying different emotions (e.g., happiness, anger, fear). Specifically, two faces were presented to subjects side by side and then were removed before the target dot appeared. The results indicated that participants with stronger approach social goals showed biases in attention to the more positive face (e.g., happy vs. neutral; neutral vs. negative), compared to those with weaker approach goals (Gable and Berkman, 2008). We also used trials with pictures of nonsocial stimuli (e.g., ice cream, chair, garbage); however, social goals did not predict responses in these trials.

Thus, we have some preliminary evidence that one mechanism by which social goals affect outcomes such as loneliness and relationship satisfaction is that goals direct attention toward or away from different social cues. More work is needed to understand these attentional biases, but it is likely that they are one important pathway through which social goals influence everyday social interactions and consequently long-term social outcomes (see also Chapter 8 in this volume). For example, a woman offers a fleeting smile to her partner from across the table during the family dinner. Does her partner recognize the smile—providing an opportunity for a quick connection? Instead, does the smile go unnoticed—the opportunity lost? Or, the same woman shows a fleeting frown to her partner from across the table. Does her partner register the frown—possibly taking offense? Instead, does the frown go unnoticed? While each exchange may be small, it is these dozens, perhaps hundreds, of daily interactions that form the basis of close relationships.
Interpretation of Ambiguous Social Information  Another process integral to navigating the social world is interpretation. This is especially important in social interactions because a good portion of social behavior is ambiguous, or the intentions of the social actor are unclear. When a friend comments, “You look great today,” is the implication that most days your physical appearance is subpar, or is the comment an innocent admiration of today’s wardrobe choice? Is your partner’s distant mood a reflection of the discussion you had this morning or something that happened at work? Indeed, there is often no clear standard by which to judge social cues, and social goals may influence how information is viewed. Being particularly attuned to social incentives may bias one to interpret information as positive in order to take advantage of all opportunities, whereas being particularly attuned to social threats may bias one toward interpreting information as negative so as not to miss a potential heartache.

Strachman and Gable (2006) conducted a study in which participants were presented with a common social scenario and were asked to reproduce the story. The results showed that social goals influence the interpretation of ambiguous or neutral information. Specifically they found that strong avoidance goals were associated with interpreting seemingly neutral social information with a negative spin. For example, when the participants with strong avoidance were given a neutral description of a social behavior (e.g., the time a man picked up his date), they were likely to interpret this information negatively (e.g., he was late picking up his date). Although this research did not examine existing relationships (participants interpreted the behavior of a fictitious person), the implications that negatively interpreting neutral or even positive behavior from one’s partner have for the health of the close relationship are straightforward. Again, taken individually, these biases may each seem small; however, repeatedly putting a negative or positive spin on neutral information could have a large impact on relationships. More research is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

Memory  Once social information has been attended to and interpreted, it is stored in (or lost to) memory. Memory is particularly important because of its underlying role in expectations that are carried into future interactions with the relationship partner or into similar social contexts. According to Neuberg’s (1996) summary expectancy-confirmation processes can bias future interactions in several ways: how information is gathered from the target, behavior toward the target, and through behavior elicited from the target. This seems particularly important in close relationships because which experiences out of the numerous interactions one has with a partner will determine expectancies. In addition to factors that we know to influence memory (e.g., the peak-end rule), approach and avoidance social motives and goals may influence the type of information recalled.

Strachman and Gable (2006) also tested memory in the study just described and found evidence for biases influenced by social motivation. Specifically, people with strong preexisting avoidance social goals had better memory of negative behaviors enacted by an actor in the story. Not surprisingly, they also had a more negative evaluation of the social actors in the story. Strachman and Gable also experimentally manipulated participants’ social goals for an upcoming interaction
with a stranger. Those in the avoidance goal condition remembered more negative information about this stranger than those in the approach goal condition. These results suggest that social motivation can bias memory of social information from a previous unknown social partner. Whether these memory biases exist in long-term close relationships is a question for future research; however, work on the elaborate cognitive biases (as described in Chapter 6 in this volume) likely involves biases in memory.

**Weight of Social Information** Assuming that social information is attended to, interpreted in a specific way, and remembered, how is that information then used to make global evaluations? That is, a series of positive interactions in a marriage may be noticed, interpreted, and remembered equally by both spouses. However, one spouse may deem these interactions as trivial in terms of her overall marital satisfaction, whereas the other spouse may view them as the main component of his overall marital satisfaction. It is possible that approach and avoidance motivation systematically influences how social information is used in global evaluations. It follows from the model that approach social motivation will be positively correlated with the weight that the presence (or absence) of positive social information and interactions receives in global evaluations. And avoidance social motivation should be positively correlated with the weight that is placed on the presence (or absence) of negative social information and interactions when making global evaluations.

Updegraff, Gable, and Taylor (2004) examined this in the context of general approach and avoidance goals and positive and negative emotions. In both a laboratory study and a signal-contingent daily experience study, they found that high-approach participants (BAS) made satisfaction ratings that were more strongly tied to positive affect as compared with low-approach participants. Although this pattern has not yet been tested in the context of social relationships, the approach and avoidance motivation model predicts that differences in motivation and goals should influence, for example, how different qualities of relationships (e.g., intimacy, trust) are weighted in overall satisfaction. Specifically, approach motives and goals should be positively correlated with outcomes such as passionate love, and avoidance motives and goals will be negatively correlated with outcomes such as security. Specifically, those high on approach motives and goals are likely to be satisfied in relationships that are characterized by incentives and those high on avoidance motives and goals are likely to be satisfied in relationships that are characterized by the absence of threats. Global evaluations of satisfaction are likely to be very important to relationship stability and decisions regarding staying or leaving a relationship.

**Evaluation of Progress on Goals** One of the defining features a relationship is that it persists over time. Therefore, it is likely that individuals evaluate the progress they are making on their goals in those relationships over time. Carver and Scheier's (1982, 1990) Control-Process Model predicts that an important element of affective experience is progress on goals. Specifically, their model posits that one's current level of goal attainment is compared to a standard; if progress
approach and avoidance Motivation in Close relationships

exceeds the standard, positive affect is experienced; if progress falls short of the standard, negative affect is experienced; and if progress is equal to the standard, no affect is experienced. In terms of the focus of goals, the type of positive affect experienced upon success with avoidance goals (avoiding threat) is relief, and with approach goals (attaining incentive) it is joy. The type of the negative affect experienced upon failure with avoidance goals (not avoiding threat) is anxiety, and with approach goals (not attaining incentive) it is disappointment (see Carver, 2004; Higgins, 1997). It is likely that relationship quality will be a function of the emotional experience as a function of rate of progress on approach and avoidance goals in one’s romantic relationship.

It is also likely that the signals related to goal progress are different in approach and avoidance frameworks. For example, when someone has the goal of not upsetting his partner, he is only one conflict away from failure at any given time, regardless of how many smooth interactions he experiences with his partner. However, someone who has an approach goal of having fun and meaningful experiences with his partner grows closer to this goal with each enjoyable outing. Although goal progress in ongoing social relationships has not been examined (to my knowledge), it is likely a fruitful topic for research.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although previous research on motivation and goals (e.g., work on general motives or achievement goals) provides an excellent starting point for research on social motives and goals, there are aspects of interpersonal relationships that are unique and require special attention. The first characteristic of relationships is that, almost by definition, they exist over time. As such, the influence of motives and goals on relationship processes should be examined across time, in repeated interactions. For example, goals in a particular relationship might change with different experiences with the partner; repeated interaction that lack threats may lessen the importance of an avoidance goal that one has concerning her partner. The second feature that needs to be addressed, and has not been done adequately here, is the dyadic nature of relationship. Although motives and goal are mainly internal to the individual,* unlike achievement goals, the ability to make progress on social goals is based partly on other people. The manner in which each individual’s goals influence the interaction is in need of examination. Indeed, the complex interaction between the motives involved in a dyad, not to mention a family or a group, are potentially fruitful investigations. At the very least, the dyadic perspective is needed in the examination of social motivation, a perspective that motivation theorists have not yet taken. While there are many challenges ahead, work investigating the influence of approach and avoidance social motivation on social relationships has great potential to yield useful and important insights into our understanding of both close relationships and personal motivation.

* An exception to this would be shared goals; although the extent that shared goals are internalized by each individual in the relationship is likely to be different.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Preparation of this chapter was facilitated by CAREER Grant #BCS 0444129 from the National Science Foundation.

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Sibling Relationships in Adolescent and Young Adult Twin and Nontwin Siblings

Managing Competition and Comparison

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INTRODUCTION

Although the sibling relationship is not studied as frequently as other family relationships, there is no doubt that it is an important relationship with its own unique characteristics. In fact, over the years I have come to believe that study of the sibling relationship has a unique contribution to make to our understanding of family relationships as a whole.

An important aspect of the relationship between siblings is the tendency for comparison and competition between them. These comparisons may be made by family members, teachers, or friends and be about physical characteristics such as physique and attractiveness, skills, and abilities or personality characteristics such as extraversion, aggressiveness, or friendliness. Given this competitive environment, siblings are likely both to compare themselves with each other and to have strong emotional reactions to comparisons made by others.

The exacerbated emotional responses evoked in siblings by comparison and competition have been attributed to distinguishable features of their relationship (Noller, 2005). The nonvolitional nature of the relationship means that sibling comparisons are often unavoidable (Wheeler and Miyake, 1992). Also, sibling comparisons begin in infancy (Dunn, 1988, 2000) and usually continue throughout the life course (Cicirelli, 1996), meaning that self-schemata based on these comparisons start to form very early in life. Over the decades, the information
processed through these filters is consistently compounded (Markus, 1977) by one’s self-evaluations (Tesser, 1988). In time, such self-evaluative processes become automatic, with an implicit effect on self-esteem that is, in turn, associated with psychosocial adjustment (Kool, Dijksterhuis, and Knippenberg, 2001).

THE SELF-EVALUATION MAINTENANCE MODEL

Tesser (1980, 1988) argued that in situations of comparison and competition, individuals tend to behave in ways that protect their self-evaluations (see also Chapter 8 in this volume for a discussion of protecting self-evaluations). According to Tesser’s (ibid.) Self-Evaluation Maintenance (SEM) Model, siblings’ reactions to comparison and competition depend on their performance (better or worse), the closeness of their relationship with their competitor, and the relevance to their self-concept of the particular aspect of their lives on which they are being compared. Thus, siblings would be expected to have weaker positive and stronger negative reactions to comparison and competition when outperformed by their sibling (rather than their friend) on a highly relevant activity. Two decades of research have provided strong support for the SEM Model (Lockwood et al., 2004; Pilkington and Smith, 2000; Tesser, 1980, 1988).

Social comparisons made by siblings are often based on perceptions of parental favoritism, a major cause of sibling jealousy (Dunn, 2000). These comparisons impinge not only on siblings’ self-evaluations but also on the quality of their relationship (Noller, 2005; Sheehan and Noller, 2002). Being outperformed by a close other threatens one’s self-evaluation and evokes defensive attributional strategies (Alicke et al., 1997; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Laprelle, 1985). Since this threat increases with the closeness of the relationship, so do the negative SEM reactions to such threats (Tesser, 1988).

Tesser (1980) used siblings as participants in an early study based on the SEM model, although the variables were operationalized differently from the studies reported here. He assessed closeness of the relationship in terms of the age difference and their perceived similarity as a measure of their identification with one another. Performance was assessed with a global measure, and identification was the dependent variable. In these studies, males’ identification with their sibling decreased with closeness when they were outperformed. Friction between the siblings increased with closeness when the respondent was outperformed, especially if the younger sibling outperformed the older sibling.

In our studies, we had siblings provide retrospective reports of situations of comparison and competition, varied in terms of the closeness of the relationship (sibling or friend), performance (better or worse), and the relevance of the activity to their self-concept, because Tesser (1988) argued that reactions to situations involving comparison and competition depend on these variables. This research was conducted with samples of both siblings and twins and using both adolescent and young adult samples.

The SEM model focuses on two processes that are proposed as the means by which individuals achieve, maintain, and bolster positive self-evaluations:
comparison and reflection. Comparison is more likely to occur when evaluating one’s performance against that of a close other (Pilkington and Smith, 2000; Tesser and Collins, 1988) and would take the form of “I am better on this activity than he/she is” or “He/she is better at this activity than I am.”

The reflection process refers to the individual’s self-evaluation being maintained or strengthened by association with the accomplishments of a close other (Cialdini et al., 1976). Reactions in this situation would take the form of “I am proud that my sister/brother is so good at that activity.” Thus, the SEM Model differs from a simple social comparison perspective by predicting the possibility of the reflection process, which becomes more important when self-relevance is low, because the better performance of a close other provides the potential for self-enhancement (Tesser and Collins, 1988).

THE EXTENDED SEM MODEL

One problem with the original SEM Model was that an individual’s investment in the relationship with the close other was not taken into account, nor was the impact that a comparison might have on that person or the relationship. By arguing that people seek to protect both their own self-evaluations and those of close others, the extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993; Beach et al., 1998) emphasizes the role of empathy in self-evaluation processes. Thus, individuals need not feel negative when they perform worse than their close other, or positive when they perform better. When outperforming a close other on an activity of high relevance to that partner, one may even feel empathic toward the close other because success in the activity is really important to him or her. In this situation, Beach and Tesser (1993) suggest that individuals can bask in the reflected glory of that close other (Beach et al., 1996; Pilkington, Tesser, and Stephens, 1991) (see discussion in Chapter 7 of this volume about how individuals interpret interactions using their mental representation of themselves as part of a dyad).

The Extended SEM Model also focuses on the possibility that close others develop a performance ecology in which each member of the pair assumes particular roles or niches. This issue is relevant to such aspects of the SEM Model as downplaying the significance and continuing the activity. Downplaying the significance of one’s success involves acting as though the good performance was a lucky fluke and not dependent on one’s skill or ability. Downplaying failure would involve acting as though one’s failure was unimportant. Individuals can either continue with activities, or they can cede those activities to their competitor, such as a sibling.

THE PRESENT SERIES OF STUDIES

The studies to be reported here involve four samples of same-sex sibling pairs: adolescent siblings and twins and young adult siblings and twins. The aims of the studies were to assess reactions to comparison and competition of each group of
sibling pairs in terms of the variables of the SEM Model (performance, closeness, and relevance) and to explore implications of these emotional reactions for psychological adjustment. The associations between reactions to competition and comparison and birth order were also explored, along with the effects of sibling relationship quality.

**Hypotheses**

We had two hypotheses based on Tesser’s (1980, 1988) SEM Model. The first hypothesis proposed that emotional reactions would be affected by the interaction of performance, closeness, and relevance with stronger positive and weaker negative reactions when participants outperformed their sibling on activities of high self-relevance and stronger negative and weaker positive reactions when they were outperformed by their sibling on activities high in self-relevance. The second hypothesis proposed that emotional reactions to competition and comparison would be related to the quality of the sibling relationship and that this variable would mediate the association between such reactions and psychological adjustment.

We also had two hypotheses based on the Extended SEM Model. The first hypothesis proposed that siblings would downplay success when they outperformed their sibling on activities of high relevance to that sibling and thus would protect their sibling’s self-evaluation and their own self-evaluation by downplaying failure on tasks of high self-relevance. The second hypothesis proposed that those outperformed by their close other on highly self-relevant activities would be less likely to continue those activities than those who outperformed their sibling on activities of high relevance to the sibling.

**Participants**

The adolescent sibling sample consisted of 38 pairs of male and 71 pairs of female siblings ($M = 15.5$ years). The adolescent twin sample consisted of 49 pairs of male (27 monozygotic and 22 dizygotic) and 72 pairs of female twins (36 monozygotic and 36 dizygotic) ($M = 14.63$ years).

The young adult sibling sample included 120 dyads ($M = 19.7$ years): 87 female dyads and 33 male dyads. The young adult twin sample consisted of 120 dyads (73 monozygotic and 47 dizygotic), ($M = 20$ years): 81 female and 39 male dyads. All dyads lived with their families, with more than 80% living with their two biological parents.

**Procedure**

Data for the SEM comparisons were collected retrospectively. Each participant described eight situations involving competition or comparison with their sibling or friend, four involving friends and four siblings; in each set, two situations involved performing better and two performing worse, one of high relevance to the self and
low relevance to the competitor, and the other of low relevance to the self and high relevance to the partner. Participants then recorded their reactions to the competitor in terms of positivity and negativity, their likelihood of downplaying the significance of their performance, and their likelihood of continuing to participate in that activity. They also reported on the quality of their relationship with their sibling and on their psychological adjustment.

**EMOTIONAL REACTIONS**

*Adolescent Nontwin Siblings*

When outperformed on an activity of high personal relevance, siblings reported more positive reactions when competing with their sibling than their friend, although the SEM Model would predict less positive reactions when outperformed by their sibling. Perhaps, because of the ongoing relationship between siblings, they cannot afford to react negatively to being outperformed by them. In situations where they performed better, siblings reported more negative feelings when competing with their sibling than their friend, suggesting some concern about the negative impact of their superior performance on their relationship with their sibling, as would be predicted by the Extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993).

When outperformed, siblings reported significantly more negative reactions when competing on tasks of high self-relevance than tasks of low self-relevance. Thus, when self-evaluation was threatened because of being outperformed on a highly self-relevant task, siblings responded more negatively as the negative comparison process came into play. On tasks of low self-relevance, however, the reflection process seems to have come into play, and their reactions were less negative.

Birth order also affected reactions to being outperformed by one’s sibling. Older siblings reported more positive and less negative reactions when outperformed by their younger sibling on low relevance than on high relevance activities. When outperformed by their younger siblings on high relevance tasks, however, older siblings were less positive and more negative than were younger siblings outperformed by their older siblings on such tasks. Younger siblings reported more negative reactions to being outperformed by their older sibling on tasks of low than of high relevance. Younger siblings seem to cope better with being outperformed by their sibling than do older siblings. Of course, they can attribute their older siblings’ superior performance to their age difference. Younger siblings also reacted less positively to outperforming their older siblings on activities of high relevance to the older sibling than on low relevance activities. They may perceive their superior performance as potentially damaging to the sibling bond and feel empathy for their older siblings, in line with the Extended SEM Model.

*Adolescent Twins*

Emotional reactions were affected by relevance of the task and performance on the task but not by closeness of the competitor. Twins showed self-enhancing reactions
as predicted by the SEM Model, reporting stronger positive feelings when performing better than their close other on tasks of high self-relevance than low self-relevance. In addition, the reporting twin was more positive and less negative about being outperformed when the task was not self-defining and to bask in the reflected glory of their twin’s successful performance. Self-protective reactions also occurred, because twins reported more negative feelings toward their twins when outperformed on self-defining tasks where their self-concept was threatened.

Zygosity also affected the level of positive emotion experienced, with monozygotic twins reporting more positive reactions to competition and comparison than dizygotic twins, irrespective of performance or relevance. Thus, although closeness did not interact with performance and relevance as defined by the model, monozygotic twins tended to react more positively. Perhaps monozygotic twins see their close relationship as buffering them against any negative effects of competition on that closeness.

In line with the findings for nontwin sibling relationships, younger twins reported more positive and less negative emotional reactions when outperformed by their older twin on tasks of high personal relevance than did older twins outperformed by their younger twin on tasks of high relevance to themselves. Even twins seem to define themselves as younger or older. Perhaps younger twins cope with their poorer performance by attributing the superior performance of their twin to their older age. As for siblings, being outperformed by one’s twin seems to be more damaging to self-evaluation for the older member of the dyad.

Younger twins reported more positive and less negative emotional reactions when outperformed by their twin than their friend on high personal relevance tasks. Hence, younger twins may find it easier to bask in the glory of their older twin’s success, whereas they may find it more damaging to their self-evaluation to be outperformed by their friend. Older twins, on the other hand, reported more negative feelings when outperformed on tasks of high personal relevance by their younger twin rather than their friend. Older twins seem to find it easier to be beaten by their friend of the same age than by their twin who has been designated as younger.

Although these findings tended to apply across the sexes, we found one sex difference for negative emotional reactions. Males (but not females) reported more negative reactions when competing with their twin rather than their friend, suggesting they may be particularly competitive toward their twin, irrespective of birth order.

Young Adult Siblings

Positive reactions were affected by closeness, relevance, performance, and sex, with the expected closeness by relevance by performance interaction predicted by the SEM Model only occurring for females. On high relevance activities, females were more positive when performing better than their sibling than when performing worse than their sibling or friend. They were also more positive on high relevance
activities when performing better than their friend than their sibling. This finding suggests empathy for the sibling rather than the friend when outperforming them, in line with the Extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993).

The predicted three-way interaction was not found for negative emotions for either sex. Negative reactions were affected by closeness, with more negativity reported against a sibling than a friend and by the interaction of performance and relevance. In line with the original SEM Model, participants were particularly negative when performing worse on a high relevance activity than a low relevance activity.

Young Adult Twins

The expected three-way interaction of closeness, relevance, and performance was found for both positivity and negativity. When performing better against their twin but not their friend, they were significantly more positive on a high relevance than a low relevance activity. Also, for activities of high self-relevance, twins were significantly more positive when performing better against their twin than their friend. When twins performed worse against their twin, they were significantly more negative on a high relevance than a low relevance activity. These findings are in line with the original SEM Model and provide little evidence of twins either having empathy for their twins when outperforming them or basking in reflected glory when outperformed.

The only effect for birth order involved an interaction with attachment security. Older twins fearful in attachment style (negative perception of both self and others; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991) were less positive than other attachment styles when outperformed by their younger twin on high but not low relevance activities. Thus, being fearful in attachment seems to exacerbate the effects of being outperformed for these older twins.

Summary

Findings for affective responses were generally in line with either the SEM Model or the Extended SEM Model. The reactions of adolescent siblings were more positive when competing with their sibling than their friend, although the original model predicted higher levels of negativity. For all groups, relevance had an impact on reactions, with participants more negative and less positive when outperformed on tasks of high rather than low relevance. For the adolescents, older siblings were more negative and less positive when outperformed by their younger sibling, and this finding held also for twins. For the young adult twins, only those fearful in attachment were more negative. There was evidence for empathy, with young adult siblings being less positive when they outperformed their sibling than when they outperformed their friend. (For more discussion of the close link between emotional reactions and our responses to interaction partners, see Chapter 13 in this volume.)
DOWNPLAYING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ONE’S PERFORMANCE

A central premise of the Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model is that participants are more likely to downplay the importance of success in an activity if they perform worse than someone close to them on an activity highly relevant to their own self-concept. In this way, they preserve their positive self-evaluation in situations of failure, and boost their self-evaluation in situations of success by playing up the importance of success on self-defining tasks.

Adolescent Siblings

Adolescent siblings reported being more likely to downplay their success on tasks of low self-relevance than high self-relevance. When competing on highly self-relevant activities, however, they were more likely to downplay the significance of their failure than their success. Hence, their reactions were protective of their sibling when they outperformed them on tasks of high relevance to the sibling and were self-enhancing when they outperformed their sibling on tasks of high self-relevance.

In terms of birth order, whereas older siblings were more likely to downplay the significance of their failure when outperformed by their younger sibling, irrespective of relevance, younger siblings tended to play down the significance of their success on tasks of high relevance to the older sibling. These younger siblings were more in tune with the self-evaluation needs of their older siblings and more protective of them than were older siblings of their younger siblings.

Adolescent Twins

The tendency of twins to downplay the importance of their performance was affected by performance and relevance but not their interaction. Twins were more likely to downplay the significance of their performance if they performed worse rather than better than their twin and if the activity was unimportant to them and, hence, important to their twin.

Birth order also affected the extent to which siblings played down the significance of their performance. Older twins were more likely than younger twins to downplay the significance of their poor performance, irrespective of relevance and closeness. Downplaying failure tends to protect their own self-evaluation and confirms that the tendency of older twins is to act in self-protective ways.

Younger twins were more likely to downplay the significance of their success when performing better than their older twin on activities of high self-relevance rather than to downplay their failure when outperformed by their twin on such activities. Thus younger twins seem to have difficulty outperforming their older twin, even on highly self-relevant tasks.
Young Adult Siblings

Participants were significantly more likely to downplay the importance of their performance on a low relevance than a high relevance activity, whether performing better or worse. Thus, for these young adults, downplaying the importance of success or failure on an activity was restricted to low relevance activities. Downplaying success on such activities would suggest empathy for the sibling and concern for their self-evaluation needs, whereas downplaying failure suggests the need to bolster one’s own self-evaluation.

Young Adult Twins

Young adult twins were significantly more likely to downplay the significance of their performance when performing worse than better, irrespective of whether competing against their twin or friend and whether the activity was of high or low relevance.

Summary

In summary, adolescents tended to protect their sibling when outperforming them on tasks of high sibling relevance and to act in self-enhancing ways when outperforming their sibling on tasks high in self-relevance. Both older siblings and twins tended to downplay their failure when outperformed by their younger sibling, irrespective of relevance. Younger twins downplayed the significance of their performance when they performed worse or when the activity was highly relevant to their twin. In general, younger twins and siblings seem to have difficulty in performing better than their twin or sibling, even when the activity is high in self-relevance.

Likelihood of Continuing the Activity

Another tenet of the SEM Model is that participants are less likely to continue participating in a high-relevance activity when they have performed worse than someone close to them in that activity.

Adolescent Siblings

When adolescent siblings performed better, they reported being more likely to continue the activity if it was of high personal relevance. Siblings would be expected to continue activities that helped maintain a positive self-evaluation and to protect their self-evaluations by discontinuing activities likely to have a negative impact. Given that there were no effects for being outperformed, however, winning seems to have a stronger effect on continuing an activity of high personal relevance than does losing. The lack of effects for closeness suggests that outperforming siblings or friends has a similar impact on the decision to continue
an activity. With regard to birth order, older siblings were more likely to continue highly self-relevant activities than younger siblings, suggesting that older siblings have more power to choose.

**Adolescent Twins**

Twins were more likely to continue activities of high than low personal relevance and if they performed better on the task. Older twins were more likely to continue highly self-relevant activities, regardless of performance, than were younger twins. Thus, older twins seem to maintain power in the relationship and to continue favored activities, irrespective of the impact on their younger sibling. Younger twins reported being more likely to continue activities when they performed better than their friend than when they performed better than their twin. This reaction may be about preserving a good relationship with the older twin and maintaining that twin's positive self-evaluation.

**Young Adult Siblings**

Older males were more likely to continue activities when performing better than their friend than worse than their friend. However, when competing against their sibling, their likelihood of continuing activities was the same regardless of performance. Again, being older seems to give a sibling more choice about whether to continue activities.

**Young Adult Twins**

Twins who performed worse against their twin were less likely to continue high relevance than low relevance activities. In contrast, twins who performed worse against their friend were equally likely to continue activities regardless of relevance. Being outperformed by one's twin is likely to be particularly negative for self-evaluations, so the best thing to do is to cede those activities to their twin and find a new niche for themselves.

**Summary**

Winning seems to have a stronger effect than losing on deciding whether to continue a high relevance activity. Older twins or siblings were more likely to continue an activity than younger ones, and older males in the young adult sample were more likely to continue an activity, irrespective of performance. Younger siblings including twins were more likely to give up activities when they outperformed their older sibling on an activity of high relevance to that sibling. Young adult twins were less likely to continue high relevance than low relevance activities if they performed worse against their twin. Perhaps it is less painful to cede these activities to their twin than to continue to compete and risk ongoing failure.
SIBLING RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Adolescent Siblings

When siblings performed worse than their sibling, they reported more positive reactions when their relationships were higher in warmth and lower in conflict. They also reported more negative reactions when the relationship was lower in warmth. When they performed better than their sibling, reactions were more positive when the relationship was lower in conflict and higher in warmth and more negative when the relationship involved higher levels of conflict. Warmth and perceived maternal and paternal partiality were correlated with self-esteem, but sibling relationship quality did not mediate the relation between emotional reactions and self-esteem. Nevertheless, the quality of the relationship seems to have an impact on siblings’ reactions to situations involving comparison and competition.

Adolescent Twins

Emotional reactions to situations of competition and comparison were affected by the quality of the twin relationship. As for the nontwin siblings, those whose relationships were high in warmth and low in conflict reacted less negatively and more positively to competition and comparison.

In addition, the extent to which twins’ reactions to competition and comparison were related to their self-esteem depended on the quality of their relationship. The self-esteem of those whose relationships were high in warmth and low in conflict was less affected by negative reactions to competition and comparison than was true for those whose relationships were low in warmth and high in conflict.

Zygosity also had an impact on the associations among emotional reactions, relationship quality, and self-esteem. For monozygotic twins, the link between emotional reactions to being outperformed and self-esteem was largely mediated by conflict. For dizygotic twins, this link was largely mediated by warmth. Thus, conflict seems to be more salient for monozygotic twins and warmth seems to be more salient for dizygotic twins in terms of the impact of competition and comparison on their self-esteem. Perhaps conflict is particularly difficult for monozygotic twins.

Young Adult Siblings

For young adult siblings, the relations between positivity and self-esteem, between negativity and self-esteem, between positivity and depression, and between negativity and depression were mediated by warmth and conflict, although parent partiality was also relevant for the latter finding. Thus, the quality of the relationship has important implications for the association between siblings’ reactions to situations of competition and comparison and their psychological adjustment.

Young Adult Twins

Regardless of performance, twins with higher self-esteem tended to be more positive and less negative, whereas twins with lower self-esteem tended to be more
negative and less positive. In addition, more depressed twins tended to be more negative and less positive, while less depressed twins tended to be more positive and less negative. Thus, twins lower in self-esteem and higher in depression responded more negatively to competitive situations, even when they performed better.

Warmth, conflict, and parental partiality all mediated the relationship between positivity and self-esteem. Results for depression were similar, with sibling warmth, conflict, and parental partiality mediating the association between emotional reactions and depression. This effect is similar to that for the young adult siblings, except that parental favoritism seems to have a greater impact for the twins. Perhaps parental favoritism is harder for twins to deal with than for nontwins, because differences in parental behavior cannot be accounted for by age or genetic differences, particularly for the monozygotic twin pairs.

Summary

In summary, the quality of the relationship between siblings is strongly associated with reactions to situations of comparison and competition and to psychological adjustment. In fact for some groups, relationship quality, particularly warmth and conflict, mediated the association between emotional reactions and psychological adjustment. (See also Chapter 13 in this volume, which discusses the link between strong positive relationships with close others and well-being.)

DISCUSSION

In general, our findings provided support for the relevance of the Self-Evaluation Maintenance Model for same-sex relationships of adolescents and young adults, although findings were not always fully consistent with the model. For example, adolescent siblings were more positive when outperformed by their sibling than their friend, although the model would predict less positivity when outperformed by their closer sibling. Perhaps adolescents see their friend as closer than their sibling. Alternatively, they may be working at preserving their relationship with their sibling, with whom they are living, rather than their friend.

Other evidence that they may be preserving their relationship with their sibling comes from the finding that they were more negative when they performed better than their sibling rather than when they performed better than their friend, perhaps because they were concerned about their superior performance disrupting their relationship with their sibling, in line with the Extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993). Siblings were also more negative when outperformed on tasks of high self-relevance than on tasks of low self-relevance, in line with the SEM Model.

Birth Order

Birth order tended to play a part in reactions to competition and comparison, even for twins. In the adolescent sample, older siblings were more positive and
less negative when outperformed on low-relevance than on high-relevance tasks. Older siblings outperformed by their younger sibling on high-relevance activities reacted more negatively than did younger siblings when outperformed by their older sibling. Although the more sanguine reactions of the younger siblings could be explained in terms of the age difference, the effect was similar for twins where the age difference is generally very small. Younger twins also seemed to find it easier to bask in the reflected glory of the older twin, in line with the finding of Tesser (1980) that there was more friction in sibling dyads when the younger sibling outperformed the older sibling.

The findings for adolescent twins suggest that even in twin relationships, one is defined as older and the other as younger. It seems likely that birth order is an important aspect of a sibling’s social identity (see Chapter 10 in this volume, for discussion of the importance of social identity). Younger twins may cope with their poorer performance by attributing the superior performance of their twin to their older age. In addition, as with sibling relationships, being outperformed by one's younger twin seems to be more damaging to the older than the younger member of the dyad. For the young adult twins, only the older twins who were insecure in attachment reacted negatively to being outperformed by their younger twin (see Chapter 4 in this volume for a more extensive discussion of adult attachment).

Given that younger siblings were also less positive about outperforming their older sibling on activities highly relevant to that sibling, they may perceive their superior performance as potentially damaging to the sibling bond and feel empathy for their older sibling in this context, in line with the Extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993). This possibility is reinforced by the finding that younger siblings downplayed the significance of their success when they outperformed their older sibling on tasks of high sibling relevance, suggesting that younger siblings are protective of their older sibling in this context. It also seems that the superiority of the older sibling is taken for granted by both members of the sibling pair. Beck, Burnet, and Vosper (2006) found that older siblings tended to be more dominant and that younger siblings tended to be more prosocial and, presumably, less achievement oriented.

**Niche Building**

Older siblings and twins were more likely to continue engaging in activities high in self-relevance, perhaps especially if they were males. Older siblings seem to have more power in the relationship than their younger siblings, and younger siblings tend to cede areas of activity to them, even when these areas are highly self-relevant. These younger siblings are likely to find other areas of activity that do not involve competition with their older sibling, in line with the niche-building or performance ecology aspect of the SEM Model (Beach et al., 1996).

**Sex**

There were few differences related to the sex of the sibling pair. Male, but not female, adolescent twins reported more negative reactions when competing with
their twin rather than their friend, suggesting that male twin dyads may be particularly competitive with each other. This finding was unrelated to birth order.

In the young adult nontwin sibling sample, the expected three-way interaction of performance, closeness, and relevance on positive reactions occurred only for females. Females were more positive when they performed better than their sibling than when they performed worse than their sibling or friend on high relevance activities. They were also more positive when they performed better than their friend than when they performed better than their sibling. This finding suggests empathy for the sibling rather than their friend when they outperform them and is in line with the Extended SEM Model (Beach and Tesser, 1993).

**Zygosity**

In the twin samples, monozygotics tended to be more positive in situations of competition than were dizygotics, suggesting that the monozygotics see their close relationship with their twin as buffering them against problems created by competition and comparison. Alternatively, perhaps they are so similar genetically that situations of comparison and competition are less salient.

**Sibling Relationship Quality**

An interesting aspect of our findings was the strong effect of sibling relationship quality on reactions to competition and comparison. For relationships high in warmth and low in conflict, the effects of negative performance on emotional reactions were less important. In addition, for both age groups, the self-esteem of those with relationships high in warmth and low in conflict were less likely to be affected by negative reactions to competition and comparison.

Thus, having a high-quality sibling relationship has implications for reactions to competition and comparison as well as for psychological adjustment. Psychological adjustment was associated with more negative reactions to competition, with those high in self-esteem more likely to react positively, irrespective of performance, and those who were depressed more likely to react negatively, even when they performed better than their sibling or twin. This vicious cycle illustrates the importance of sibling relationships to individuals’ psychological adjustment.

**Implications**

These findings point to the complex but interesting dynamics involved in sibling relationships. The tendency for older siblings to have more choice in the activities that they engage in and for younger siblings to be protective of the self-evaluation needs of the older sibling suggests that both parents and family therapists need to be aware of these tendencies and to ensure that the younger sibling is not disadvantaged in activities where they show real promise. The most interesting aspect of these findings was the extent to which birth order differences occurred for twins as well as siblings.
Another particularly interesting aspect of the findings was the importance of the quality of the sibling relationship not only for siblings’ and twins’ reactions to competition and comparison but also to their psychological adjustment. How often, we could ask, when an adolescent or young adult becomes depressed, is the quality of relationships with siblings explored? More work needs to be carried out to understand sibling relationships and their importance for individual adjustment.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This series of studies is limited in several ways. First, the situations described by participants had all occurred in the past, and it is possible that reactions to those situations had lessened over time. Also, there was no control on how long ago the events had occurred. This procedure probably meant that the situations used were highly salient to the sibling who reported them, but we may have been comparing situations that occurred very recently with others that occurred a long time ago.

It would be interesting to try to put sibling and twin pairs into *in vivo* situations of comparison and competition and have them report their emotional reactions as they occurred. The problem would be to devise situations that would be highly and equally salient for all sibling pairs. It might also be interesting to assess siblings’ attribution processes directly. For example, we don’t really know whether younger siblings attribute the older sibling’s superior performance to the age difference, although the data are in line with such a proposition.

We could also compare the reactions of siblings and twins directly to see the extent of difference between them. At this point we have explored the different ways that their responses are affected by the variables of the SEM Model but need to compare the intensity of their reactions. It could also be important to compare the reactions of adolescents and young adults and to explore developmental changes.

It is also important to emphasize here that we have studied the sibling relationships of adolescents and young adults, relationships that have stabilized to some extent. We would not want to argue that similar dynamics would necessarily be found in the relationships of younger siblings. More research is needed to establish the patterns for younger siblings.

**Conclusions**

The findings from this series of studies have provided an interesting insight into the relationships of siblings and twins in two age groups. The main focus has been on exploring their reactions to competition and comparison, a ubiquitous aspect of their daily lives. The findings have provided convincing support for both the SEM Model and the Extended SEM Model. Other factors, however, such as birth order and the quality of the relationship between the siblings are also important. More needs to be known about the attributions siblings make for their performance and the way they react to success and failure in interactions with their sibling or twin. Focusing on the relationships of twins as well as siblings has provided important information about how these relationships work, particularly when self-evaluation is threatened.
REFERENCES


Managing Relationship Problems
Introduction

One who undertakes to punish rationally does not do so for the sake of the wrongdoing, which is now in the past—but for the sake of the future, that the wrongdoing shall not be repeated.

Plato
Close relationships are the source of our most intense emotions, from the joys of love and attachment to the agonies of betrayal and loss. Relationship partners have the capacity to make one another deeply happy and deeply miserable. Indeed, and despite our best intentions, we will inevitably hurt the ones we love and will, in turn, be hurt by them. Sometimes we overlook such hurts or explain them away as unintentional and unimportant in the overall context of our relationship. At other times we may feel that the bottom has dropped out of our world—how could someone who loves me have treated me like this? Some hurtful behaviors (e.g., ostracism) may be judged unforgivable and lead to relationship meltdown (see Chapter 18 in this volume). Others may be judged forgivable, if not immediately then over the longer term. Either way, a wounded partner may experience great pain, and although drugs like alcohol may dull the suffering in the short term, ultimately this is not a pain that responds to analgesics. So how do suffering partners go about making themselves feel better?

We argue in this chapter that one important strategy people use to relieve their own distress is to punish, or inflict pain, on the person who most “deserves” it—the partner who caused the distress in the first place. This retaliatory response to pain is, to an extent, hard-wired (witness an infant hitting in rage when he has been constrained or thwarted in some way) and serves a variety of potentially adaptive functions (though it may have destructive and tragic consequences). We also argue that although the urge to punish or wreak vengeance is a natural human response to pain, such punitive urges and behaviors are not necessarily incompatible with the successful resolution of relationship conflict, or ultimately, forgiveness of partner betrayal.

We begin with a discussion of the features and functions of punishment, revenge, and forgiveness from an evolutionary, social-psychological perspective (see also Chapter 3 in this volume). We then present data from studies of lay theories of punishment in close relationships and discuss the findings of an empirical study of punishment in marriage. Lay theories of forgiveness and the role of punishment in the process of forgiving partner transgressions also are considered. Finally, we argue the case for more explicitly considering the role of punishment as an important step along the road to repairing damaged relationships and call for more theoretically integrative research on this important topic.

**PUNISHMENT AND REVENGE: FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS**

The terms *punishment* and *revenge* tend to be used synonymously, but the constructs can be theoretically distinguished. According to the *Macquarie Dictionary* (1992), to punish means “to subject to a penalty or to pain, loss, confinement, death etc., for some offence, transgression, or fault” with punishment being “that which is inflicted as a penalty” (p. 1428). Revenge, on the other hand, is defined as “retaliation for injuries or wrongs; vindictiveness; to exact expiation on behalf of a person for a wrong, especially in a resentful or vindictive spirit” (ibid., p. 1502).
Punishment, then, implies a cool, rational, and legitimate, if not moral, right to inflict harm on another. Revenge, on the other hand, implies spite and the uncontrolled expression of emotions such as resentment and hate. Of course, the boundaries are fuzzy and may depend on the perspectives of the people involved. In particular, punishment may seem morally justified to the punisher but feel like unwarranted vindictiveness to the target (Kim and Smith, 1993; Zaibert, 2006).

There is no doubt that the urge for revenge is powerful and ubiquitous. As Frijda (2007, p. 260) noted, the biblical law of talion (“for an eye, no more than an eye; for a tooth, no more than a tooth,” Exodus 21:23–25) actually represented an important advance in lawfulness “because it served to hem in blind vengeance.” Left unchecked, the urge for vengeance can lead to the kinds of excesses that have occurred throughout history, including sadistic tortures, mass slayings, and even genocide (Baumeister, 1997). Despite its propensity to run amok, however, evolutionary theorists argue that the desire for revenge has served an adaptive function over human evolutionary history (e.g., Pinker, 1997). Specifically, it discourages behavior that potentially interferes with survival and reproductive goals. Indeed, and despite well-meaning advice to “turn the other cheek,” if there were no retaliation or threat of retaliation following real or threatened damage to humans and their kin, they would be utterly exploitable (and dead). Righteous anger and its associated urge to take reparative action, then, is a potentially adaptive response to situations in which we are not getting what we want or in which we are getting what we do not want (Roseman, Spindel, and Jose, 1990). Further, codified systems of legal sanctions and punishments for undesirable behaviors are held to serve the same kind of deterrence function (Frijda, 2007; Solomon, 1994).

Interestingly, there is limited information on the extent to which other animals punish or take revenge on one another. Brosnan (2006) noted that, like human infants, chimpanzees respond with temper tantrums if they do not get what they want. She further theorized that primates have evolved the capacity to respond negatively to perceived unfairness or inequity, a judgment that presumably requires a rather sophisticated sense of “right” and “wrong.” Hauser (2000), too, observed that Rhesus monkeys are more likely to be attacked by other group members if they fail to announce their food discoveries than if they announce them by calling and that vampire bats frequently fail to regurgitate blood for free-loading bats who have withheld blood from others in the past. As Hauser noted, from a functional perspective, these behaviors look like punishment, but to confirm this we would need to know that such behaviors deter further offending, that free-loaders know they are breaking the rules, and that the goal of punishers is to correct or deter free-loading. Currently, we cannot confirm any of these propositions.

We do know, however, that revenge serves a variety of functions for human beings and that humans wreak revenge for a variety of reasons (and not simply behavioral deterrence). For example, in a study of 152 university students Yoshimura (2007) found that people who perceived they had less power than those who had hurt them engaged in more extreme acts of revenge as a way of achieving dominance. Taking revenge means causing events to happen, as opposed to being a passive victim of other people’s hurtful behaviors (Frijda, 2007). Further, taking control feels good; thus, taking revenge can help to boost self-esteem (Baumeister, 1997).
In fact, the desire for revenge can be so strong and its rewards so sweet that people will even take it at considerable cost to themselves. In an intriguing example of this counterintuitive notion, participants who had been exposed to betrayal scenarios underwent positron emission tomography (PET) scans of their brains’ reward pathways as they plotted their revenge (De Quervain et al., 2004). As might be expected, participants showed the strongest activation levels (indicating pleasure) when they levied the maximum fine to offenders at no cost to themselves. However, their reward pathways also showed considerable activation even when they had to pay for their revenge.

In summary, revenge can be rationalized as a bad behavior deterrence mechanism. However, the urge to get even with someone who has wronged us is also a powerful emotional desire that, once satisfied, may elicit feelings of pleasure, control, and a sense that justice has been done. Further, revenge lets the world know that we will not tolerate mistreatment. An interesting issue that arises, then, concerns the role of forgiveness in dealing with individuals who do us harm. Under what circumstances do people forego the pleasures of revenge and choose forgiveness or reconciliation instead? And do people ever both take revenge for and forgive the same offense, or are the two constructs mutually exclusive?

**FORGIVENESS: FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS**

Until recently, the study of forgiveness was the almost exclusive preserve of philosophers and theologians. Whole treatises have been devoted to teasing out the differences among excusing, condoning, exonerating, and forgiving; arguing whether some offenses are just too wicked to forgive; and debating the rights and wrongs of punishment and revenge in the process of seeking justice or reconciliation (e.g., Murphy and Hampton, 1988). Within psychology, research on forgiveness was initially driven by clinical concerns (e.g., see Freedman, Enright, and Knutson, 2005), with programs devised to promote forgiveness as a crucial aspect of resolving interpersonal conflict. Recently, social psychologists have become interested in the concept of forgiveness, not in a prescriptive sense but in a spirit of scientific curiosity about the ways people resolve (or not) their interpersonal conflicts. For example, researchers have examined individual differences in the propensity to forgive and have explored the correlates and outcomes of forgiveness in a variety of contexts, including marriage (e.g., Fincham, Hall, and Beach, 2005).

From a functional perspective, forgiveness has been conceptualized as both a desirable and adaptive conflict resolution strategy and as a foolish and nonadaptive strategy, depending on the context and the orientation of the investigator. According to Friedrich Nietzsche (cited by Luebbert, 1999), for example, to forgive is to open oneself to the likelihood of exploitation and demonstrates a lack of fitness in the ruthless battle for survival. Others, however, have argued that forgiveness and revenge are two sides of the same coin and that the evolution of one inevitably has required the evolution of the other (e.g., Solomon, 1994). The proposed mechanisms underpinning the evolution of forgiveness derive from the principles of kin selection (i.e., self-sacrifice for those who share our genes) and reciprocal altruism (i.e.,
cooperation for mutual benefit; Trivers, 1971). Simply put, it frequently makes sense for interdependent, social animals to suppress or moderate the urge for revenge for the sake of a greater benefit, such as maintaining important relationships.

In his account of the survival value of forgiveness, Luebbert (1999) described the reconciliatory behaviors that frequently follow disputes among great apes (e.g., see de Waal, 1991); primates make peace, as well as war. Similarly, Luebbert argued that over evolutionary history, humans who forgave one another were more reproductively successful than humans who did not because of the security and resource benefits provided by close, caring others (see Chapter 3 in this volume). This adaptive function of forgiveness was explicitly identified by Chinese participants who claimed the primary function of forgiveness was to maintain social harmony (Fu, Watkins, and Hui, 2004). Similarly, in a study conducted by Younger et al. (2004), the most frequently mentioned reason for forgiveness among their student sample was that the relationship was too important to give up.

Clearly, in the context of human survival relationships are crucial, and the successful maintenance of relationships requires forgiveness. As discussed previously, however, the evolution of forgiveness also requires the evolution of punishment since unlimited forgiveness leaves us open to unlimited exploitation. An interesting question, then, concerns how close relationship partners negotiate these competing imperatives in response to relationship transgressions. Do they indulge their emotional desires for punishment and revenge, or do they forgive without retaliation? Do they typically punish and forgive only when a partner is perceived to have paid an appropriate penalty? And how do relationship partners calibrate the scales of justice in the context of hurt feelings, desires for revenge, and perhaps even compassion for the offending partner? The next section of the chapter discusses these questions in light of some data from studies of people’s theories about, and experiences of, punishment and forgiveness in close relationships.

REVENGE, PUNISHMENT, AND FORGIVENESS IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Of the research that has been conducted thus far on revenge and punishment, very little has taken an explicitly close relationship perspective. Researchers have, however, noted that the prototypical reaction to being hurt by one’s partner is to reject or hurt the partner in turn (e.g., Murray et al., 2003; see also Chapter 18 in this volume). There is also evidence to suggest that marital happiness (or unhappiness) has an important role to play in the extent to which partners deliberately hurt one another. For example, the tendency for unhappy relationship partners to reciprocate negative emotions and behaviors in escalating spirals has been well documented (e.g., Gottman, 1994). Similarly, the literature on accommodation in marriage has demonstrated that, compared with unhappy spouses, happy spouses make active efforts to inhibit their impulses to react destructively to perceived partner provocations and to respond constructively instead (e.g., see Rusbult et al., 1998).
There is no question about the depth of feelings that may motivate seriously vengeful behaviors in unhappy relationships. Gabriel and Monaco (1994), for example, cited a case study in which an abandoned husband broke into his ex-wife’s apartment through a window and shredded all of her clothing: “This, he said, had made him feel ‘much improved.’ He also reported homicidal wishes and fantasies, and “talked in some detail of his fervent wish and intention to do more than simply kill her. He wanted her to suffer the way in which he had suffered, i.e., feeling alone, frightened, and humiliated” (p.173). Frijda (2007), too, cited research from Wolfgang (1958) showing that the average number of knife stabbings and bullets fired in marital homicides is significantly higher than in murders in general (see Chapter 16 in this volume). Family law courts are also prime contexts for some of the most overt and destructive forms of revenge, with divorced parents using their children to punish one another, including accusations of sexual or physical assault of the children.

Of course, revenge is not always so severe or dramatic. However, there is no doubt that close relationship partners do engage in acts of punishment and revenge in response to perceived partner transgressions. In one study exploring married couples’ experiences of anger, hate, and jealousy, for example, spouses described enacting a variety of behaviors that inflicted pain on their offending partners, including verbal and physical abuse, physical or emotional withdrawal, and even abandonment (Fitness and Fletcher, 1993; see also Chapter 18 in this volume).

In another study of marital transgressions and forgiveness, newlywed and long-term married men and women were asked to describe in detail events in their marriages that they had either forgiven their partners for or that they believed their partners had forgiven them for (Fitness, 2001). Among the findings of this study, some interesting features in relation to punishment emerged. Most strikingly, marital happiness was, as might have been expected, positively associated with the reported ease of forgiving, or having been forgiven for, various kinds of offenses and betrayals. However, marital happiness was not associated with the extent to which the victim had reportedly punished or been punished by his or her partner. In fact, the vast majority of respondents claimed they had punished their partners for forgiven offenses or had been punished for forgiven offenses. The bulk of reported punishments involved ongoing reminders of the offense—teasing, “joking,” and being asked to “remember what you did.” In a supplementary study exploring unforgiven marital offenses with divorced individuals, reported punishments were more severe and were frequently described as acts of revenge. They involved behaviors such as physical abuse, abandonment, infidelity, denunciation of the partner to family and friends, turning children against the partner, and destruction of possessions.

The interesting point about these findings was that, although the types of punishments differed according to the seriousness (or perceived unforgivability) of the offense, happy, unhappy, and divorced individuals all agreed that more or less severe punishment occurred, with more or less positive or negative consequences for the relationship. Further, both punishment and revenge were reportedly motivated by the same goals: to enable the victim to communicate the depth of his or her pain; to regain some power in the relationship (i.e., to feel “one up”
relative to the partner); and, importantly for participants in ongoing relationships, to discourage reoffending. In particular, respondents noted that leaving an offense unpunished not only means letting the offender “off the hook”; it also means the offender fails to get the message about how badly he or she has behaved and may interpret lack of punishment as license to offend again. These data clearly suggest that punishment is not at all antithetical to forgiveness and that even happy partners do not necessarily inhibit punitive responses to partner provocations. Rather, whether the final outcome of a relationship conflict is forgiveness or not, punishment is likely to have occurred along the way.

**AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF PUNISHMENT AND FORGIVENESS IN RELATIONSHIPS**

An empirical demonstration of the potency of punishment in the context of perceived relationship betrayal was recently obtained from a study conducted in our laboratory. Advertised as a “food choices” study, the experiment involved 64 men and women (32 couples) whose ages ranged from 17 to 55 years, with a mean of 24.7 years. Partners had been involved in their relationships for an average of 3.7 years (range .7 months–24.5 years). Couples were randomly allocated to an experimental or control group. Then, each participant completed a questionnaire measuring, among other variables, his or her relationship satisfaction. Participants in the experimental group were then asked to recall and write about an instance in which their partner had betrayed them or broken their trust. Participants in the control group wrote about something that happened yesterday. All participants were then given, via the guise of a “Taste Experiment,” an opportunity to take an aggressive, punitive action against the partner via the administration of hot chili sauce (a technique pioneered by McGregor et al., 1998).

Participants in the experimental group, who had been primed by recalling a partner-related betrayal, punished their partners by allocating significantly more hot sauce to them than did participants in the control group. Indeed, several participants in the experimental group expressed delight at the unexpected and legitimate opportunity to inflict some pain upon their partners and to “get away with it.” We (Peterson and Fitness, in press) also found that women punished more severely than men and that the severity of punishment was inversely related to participants’ reported levels of relationship satisfaction.

In a second phase of this study, semistructured interviews were conducted with 25 couples about the role of punishment in their relationships. Every participant claimed to have punished his or her partner in some way. One woman claimed that she and her girlfriends frequently discussed the kinds of punishments they would inflict on their offending partners, including revisiting old indiscretions, using “guilt trips,” making partners apologize in writing, taking them out for dinner, or doing unpleasant tasks. Two main forms of punishment were identified: (1) to avoid the partner and withdraw benefits from them; and (2) to engage with and actively hurt them.
Overall, and in line with the findings previously discussed, punishment was considered to form an integral part of the process of forgiveness and was argued to serve a number of functions. Specifically, participants reported that punishment sends a signal that something is wrong and a relationship rule has been broken; it helps to “educate” an offending partner about the hurt partner and his or her needs; and it rebalances the relationship and moves the wounded partner back into a position of power and control. Notably, several participants also described the function of punishment as a “test” for the relationship. If a punished partner responds with empathy and remorse and does not retaliate in turn, then this is a reliable sign of commitment to the relationship. However, the onus was also considered to be on the punisher to limit the level and length of punishment, or it would itself become abuse and grounds for punishment.

The underlying theme to the various forms of punishment described by the participants in this study, then, involved emotional signaling and providing an opportunity for partner engagement through the sharing of emotion. The importance of such emotion signaling and emotional responsiveness for relationship closeness and satisfaction has previously been identified by emotion scholars (Feeney, 1995; see also Clark, Fitness, and Brissette, 2001) and is a core component of secure attachment (see Chapter 4 in this volume). In this respect, punishment in a close relationship can serve as a goal-driven, communicative signal that presents an opportunity for a caring partner to respond with an acknowledgement of the pain he or she has caused and a willingness to compensate by way of suffering some pain themselves.

Whether or not this willingness to “pay the price” for hurting a loved one invariably leads to forgiveness, however, is a moot point. Presumably there are times when a wounded partner believes justice has been done and forgiveness is warranted. However, and as noted earlier in the chapter, not all offenses are considered forgivable, and from an evolutionary perspective it may make sense under some circumstances (when the costs outweigh the benefits) to deem some kinds of relationship offenses unforgivable and to terminate relationships that are damaging to one’s physical or psychological welfare. No doubt these kinds of cost–benefit calculations depend on a variety of factors including life stage (e.g., whether or not there are young children to be cared for), commitment to the relationship (e.g., see Finkel et al., 2002), and the availability and quality of alternative partners (see also Chapter 9 and 19 in this volume).

Again, however, an interesting question concerns the extent to which laypeople explicitly think about and weigh such issues when deciding whether or not forgiveness is warranted and how much punishment, if any, an offending partner deserves. In fact, findings from the study of marital forgiveness described earlier (Fitness, 2001) demonstrate that laypeople hold quite elaborate schemas about the rights and wrongs of punishment and forgiveness in close relationships. For example, it was not so much the kind of offense committed by newlywed and long-term married participants that predicted forgiveness—betrayals, injustices, infidelities, all had been forgiven. What mattered with respect to difficulty of forgiveness were factors such as how often the offense had occurred, whether or not the offense had
involved humiliation or generated feelings of hate for the offender, lack of offender remorse, and overall marital unhappiness.

These variables are congruent with evolutionary considerations (see also Chapter 3 in this volume). For example, a repeated offense presumably activates the so-called cheater mechanism (Cosmides and Tooby, 1992), an evolved psychological mechanism theorized to be on the alert for interpersonal and social threat. Clearly, it makes sense within the context of close relationships to forgive once on the basis that everyone makes a mistake, but repeated offending signals that a partner cannot be trusted and is putting your welfare at risk. Similarly, feelings of humiliation and hate signal that one has been shamed and treated with contempt by a relationship partner; again, the implied power imbalance threatens one’s welfare: This person, on whom I depend, does not believe I am worthy of care or respect. Lack of offender remorse, too, suggests a lack of empathy and caring and is an ominous signal that an offense may be repeated, while marital unhappiness is a clear signal that the relationship is not meeting one’s needs.

Other data confirm the critical role of perceived relationship viability in the decision to forgive relationship offenses. For example, in a follow-up study to the one reported in Fitness (2001), also 250 laypeople were asked to read hypothetical vignettes describing relationship offenses and to rate each partner’s imagined thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, including the likelihood of revenge and forgiveness, on five-point Likert scales. Half the sample was told the couple depicted was happily married, and half was told the couple was unhappily married. Offenses involved breaking a promise to the partner, spending savings at the casino, making a major purchase without consultation, criticizing the partner in public, fighting with the partner in public, embarrassing the partner in front of work colleagues, and discovering one’s partner has told intimate secrets to others.

Although the offenses had been prerated in a pilot study for equivalent seriousness, in the current study the same offenses were rated as significantly more serious in the unhappy than in the happy marriage condition. Accordingly, offense seriousness was controlled for in all further data analyses. However, even after controlling for offense seriousness, people still rated offenders as significantly less guilty and remorseful in the unhappy than in the happy marital condition, and they rated victims as being significantly less likely to forgive the same offense in the unhappy than in the happy marital condition. Interestingly, however, and in line with our arguments about the centrality of punishment to the forgiveness process, victims in both the happy and the unhappy marital conditions were believed to be equally as likely to want to get even with offenders, and there was no significant association between perceived likelihood of getting even and likelihood of forgiveness.

FORGIVING AND FORGETTING IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS: AN IMPOSSIBLE IDEAL?

Just as laypeople have well-developed theories about the role of punishment in close relationships, so too can they speak, often eloquently, about the nature and
process of forgiveness in close relationships. For example, and as a blissfully happy, newlywed student noted in a seminar presentation, he had quickly learned that when his wife yelled at him, he should humbly apologize for whatever he’d apparently done or not done, regardless of the issue; she would then forgive him and peace would be restored. Although his extraordinarily accommodative view was, perhaps, a function of the intensity of his passion, respondents in a number of the studies we have conducted on the whys and wherefores of relationship forgiveness have raised a number of issues in relation to the possibilities (and wisdom) of forgiving and forgetting.

For example, and in line with previously reported findings (Fu, Watkins, and Hui, 2004; Younger et al., 2004), individuals have noted that a relationship partner may make a cognitive decision to forgive for a number of important reasons—such as to maintain a cherished relationship or for the sake of children and other family members—to promote social harmony. However, as one respondent explained, “Your heart is not always so ready to forgive,” especially when a reminder of the offense triggers fresh pain, anger, and hurt (even years after the offense). Many respondents reported experiencing difficulties in reconciling their thoughts and their feelings and found themselves “fighting” strong urges to punish an officially forgiven partner. This has interesting implications for the strong cognitivist position that emotion is always an outcome of cognition—clearly, powerful emotions can hijack cognition when the stakes are high (Planalp and Fitness, 1999).

Such comments also raise an interesting question about the kinds of emotions that might motivate forgiveness or reconciliation. As previously discussed, evolutionary accounts suggest that we evolved the capacity to forgive in conjunction with the capacity to punish. There is no mystery about the emotions that motivate punishment and revenge; anger and rage are evolved psychological mechanisms that respond quickly to frustration and perceived injustice, and both are associated with impulses to lash out and address—or redress—a perceived wrong. Hate, too, is a potentially powerful motivator of behaviors directed at destroying another, or at least diminishing another’s well-being (Fitness and Fletcher, 1993; see also Rempel and Burris, 2005, for an analysis of hate-related motives). Which emotions, however, motivate forgiveness?

Theorists have argued that the prime emotional motivators of forgiveness are empathy and compassion (McCullough, Worthington, and Rachal, 1997). In other words, it is the painful awareness of a loved one’s remorseful suffering that motivates forgiveness. However, the data from our studies suggest that the issue is not so simple. Most people can bring to mind occasions when they passionately wanted to “kill” (or maim or torture) their relationship partners, but no individuals in our studies reported passionate, empathic desires to forgive their partners. In part this may be because pain and distress are vivid and memorable experiences, associated with powerful, self-protective urges (as noted by Baumeister et al., 2001, there are sound evolutionary reasons why bad is inevitably “stronger” than good). Nonetheless, for our respondents at least, forgiveness appeared to be a considered, cognitive process rather than an emotional one. Indeed, respondents noted that one must strive to “let go” of anger and hurt or at least to allow the intensity of these emotions to diminish before one can even think about forgiveness.
Interestingly, a minority of respondents argued against this, claiming there is no moral victory in forgiving an offense over which one is not currently suffering. For them, forgiveness meant feeling the hurt and anger but giving up the urge and the “right” to punish because of love, or specifically Christian values. It should also be noted that there is a potential problem with thinking too hard about whether or not to forgive. In a recent paper by McCullough, Bono, and Root (2007), longitudinal data clearly demonstrated that ruminating about offenses reignites anger and actually makes forgiveness more difficult (see also Chapter 7 in this volume).

Another potential problem with forgiveness identified by our respondents concerned the possibilities of exploitation and abuse of power. As noted previously, evolutionary theorists have speculated that humans are highly sensitive to the possibility of being exploited by cheaters who, for example, promise reciprocation of benefits that never eventuate (e.g., Cosmides and Tooby, 1992; Shackelford and Buss, 1996). Similarly, a number of respondents claimed that although forgiving once, or maybe twice, was both feasible and desirable, only a fool would continue to forgive in the face of continuing betrayal. Zechmeister et al. (2004) also noted that the ideal of unconditional forgiveness may be just that—an impossible ideal. Notably, participants in their studies required offenders to make amends, particularly following a verbal apology (which, ironically, admits accountability). Indeed, they noted that apologies on their own can make a delicate situation worse—offenders need to make amends and “pay” for their crimes if they are to win forgiveness.

**IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

In his recently published work on “the best and worst of human nature,” primatologist De Waal (2005, p. 199) recounted a story of a dinner party at which a man commented that he “kept track on his computer every day of what he had done for his wife and what she had done for him.” De Waal noted that the general consensus around the dinner table was that this was not a good idea and commented that at the time, the man was talking about his third wife but was now married to his fifth.

De Waal’s (2005) dinner companions clearly understood that the behavior of this relational accountant would lead to trouble because it violated the norms of so-called communal relationships (e.g., see Clark, Fitness, and Brissette, 2001). Unlike business or exchange relationships, partners in communal relationships do not keep close track of benefits given and received; rather, they are committed to one another’s welfare and are willing to endure a certain amount of inequity and sacrifice for the sake of the greater good—the relationship. On this basis it makes sense to suppose that, to the extent that relationship partners are committed to one another’s welfare, they also do not keep close track of the slights, hurts, and misunderstandings that inevitably arise in the course of everyday interactions. And in fact, relationship partners (or at least, happy ones) frequently do choose to overlook relatively minor offenses for the sake of the greater good—maintaining the relationship.
This does not mean, however, that happy spouses do not experience a sense of injustice and an urge for revenge in response to partner transgressions. Indeed, some very happily married respondents in the studies reported in this chapter noted the secret pleasures to be gained by “paying back” offending partners in ways that escape notice but that fulfill the need to see justice restored. For example, one female respondent claimed that when she was feeling resentful toward her partner for some perceived slight or incident of neglect, she would make herself a cup of coffee without offering her partner a cup. He was not aware that he was being punished, but she felt better, knowing that she had obtained a benefit he had missed out on.

Currently we know little about how this works. However, there clearly are many individuals who have figured out how to balance the need to punish and deter exploitation and future harm with the need to forgive and to maintain a close, rewarding relationship (see also Chapter 17 in this volume). However, the upwardly spiraling marital separation and divorce rates suggest that many other individuals are not particularly skilled at this. These are fascinating areas for further research. For example, how do relationship partners calibrate the scales of justice in response to marital offences and decide how much punishment—as opposed to revenge—is enough? And how does marital happiness or unhappiness skew these calculations?

These are important questions, for one of the most serious problems with punishment and revenge concerns the different forms of accounting used by victims and offenders when calculating appropriate punishments (Kim and Smith, 1993). In particular, offenders tend to minimize the harm they have caused, whereas victims tend to maximize their own suffering; thus, victims perceive a great deal more pain and suffering is “owing” than the offender believes is fair and reasonable, and this perceptual mismatch leads to escalating cycles of revenge and counterrevenge. Given how little is known about the ways spouses go about making these kinds of complex cognitive and emotional calculations over time, this is clearly a fertile research area.

Another interesting research area concerns individual differences that might facilitate people’s abilities to negotiate the potential minefield of punishing and forgiving. For example, in an exploration of emotional intelligence and forgiveness, Fitness and Mathews (1998) found positive associations between emotion clarity, or the (self-reported) ability to understand emotions and how they work, and both relationship happiness and forgiveness in marriage. These findings suggest that the ability to understand the causes, features, and outcomes of emotions facilitates the constructive resolution of even the most hurtful marital transgressions and contributes significantly to perceptions of marital satisfaction (Fitness, 2006). Attachment style, too, is likely to be an important factor in successfully negotiating punishment and forgiveness. As attachment theorists have pointed out (see Chapters 4 and 5 in this volume), individuals who trust that close relationship partners will be there for them over the long term have a secure base from which they can better regulate their negative emotions and constructively resolve relationship problems.
CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There is a famous French proverb: “To understand all is to forgive all.” Like many proverbs, it is nonsense. The reality is that regardless of how well injured relationship partners understand the causes and circumstances associated with other-caused hurt and pain, forgiveness is only one of a variety of options for them. Further, if forgiveness comes at all, it may be qualified and preceded by a degree of punishment that, while it hurts the offender, may actually help the victim both to feel better and, ironically, to be more willing to forgive. Clearly, there is a great deal more to discover about the difficulties faced by relationship partners in negotiating these kinds of interpersonal challenges. It is our hope that over the coming years we will achieve a much deeper understanding of these two most powerful and primal human motivations: to hurt those who have hurt us and to maintain our relationships with the ones we love.

REFERENCES


Intimate Partner Violence Peretration

Insights from the Science of Self-Regulation

ELI J. FINKEL
**INTRODUCTION**

*Intimate partner violence* (IPV) refers to any behavior carried out with the primary proximal intent to cause physical harm to a romantic partner who is motivated to avoid being harmed. Research on IPV rose to prominence in the 1970s and has flourished ever since. As I reviewed this body of research recently (Finkel, 2007a, 2007b), one aspect of it that struck me is the meagerness of the social psychological contributions relative to the contributions from other disciplines.* After all, social psychologists generally pride ourselves on our talents in studying interpersonal processes, and hundreds of us have devoted large swaths of our careers to investigating such processes as they pertain to conflictual or otherwise aversive interpersonal processes. For example, other chapters in this volume investigate the expression of negative emotion in romantic relationships (see Chapter 11 in this volume), attention to desired-sex partners outside of one’s committed romantic relationship (see Chapter 19 in this volume), punishment and forgiveness in romantic relationships (see Chapter 15 in this volume), relational ostracism (see Chapter 18 in this volume), competition among siblings (see Chapter 14 in this volume), the negative evaluations individuals form about their relationships when in a bad mood (see Chapter 12 in this volume), and even the potentially destructive consequences (at least for men) of talking about one’s romantic relationship (see Chapter 7 in this volume).

Despite this emphasis on studying such aversive interpersonal processes, however, we as a field have ventured only rarely into the domain of IPV, leaving this topic primarily to sociologists, clinical psychologists, and scholars from other disciplines. In this chapter, I begin integrating the largely independent research literatures on social psychology and IPV toward the goal of building a more psychologically informed process model of IPV than those that currently exist. Rather than reviewing all social psychological research domains that could possibly be relevant to IPV, I focus in particular on social psychology’s self-regulation literature.

I begin by reviewing the IPV literature as it pertains to incidence rates, gender differences, and a distinction between two different forms of IPV. Next, I selectively review the dominant theoretical paradigms employed by scholars to understand IPV. I then introduce a process-oriented model of IPV that strives to impose theoretical coherence on the identified IPV risk factors (see also Finkel, 2007a, 2007b); this model breaks from extant perspectives by emphasizing the central importance of self-regulation in helping individuals refrain from enacting violent behaviors even when they experience violent impulses. Finally, I describe five recent empirical investigations that systematically test the importance of the self-regulation component of this process-oriented model and conclude with a brief discussion of the implications of the self-regulation literature for IPV-relevant clinical interventions. Throughout this chapter, I focus exclusively on the *initiation* of violence in a specific social interaction between heterosexual partners that had theretofore

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* I use the term *social psychology* and its variants to refer to the subdiscipline within psychology commonly referred to with that label. I do not intend to refer to the smaller subdiscipline within sociology that also uses that label.
been nonviolent; I do not examine IPV as self-defense, nor do I examine psychological or sexual aggression.

INCIDENCE RATES, GENDER, AND TWO FORMS OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Individuals enact violent behaviors against marital and dating partners with disturbing frequency (e.g., Magdol et al., 1997; Straus, 2004). Large-sample, representative surveys in the United States, for example, suggest that approximately one of every six couples every year experiences at least one act of IPV (Schafer, Caetano, and Clark, 1998; Straus and Gelles, 1986). And, counter to many early IPV scholars’ intuition, the literature reveals that men and women perpetrate acts of IPV at near-equal rates (Archer, 2000; Ehrensaft, Moffitt, and Caspi, 2004).

These incidence estimates, however, oversimplify the story. A review of this sometimes contradictory literature suggests that women are slightly more likely then men to perpetrate acts of IPV, although there is a rare, severe form of IPV that is perpetrated predominantly by men (Straus, 1999). For example, studies of crime (e.g., Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997) and those that frame the research to participants as an investigation of “personal safety” (e.g., Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000) reveal both substantially lower overall levels of IPV and a large gender asymmetry (with greater male perpetration) than do studies that frame the study as an investigation of conflict in relationships (see Straus, 1999).

Johnson (1995, in press) and Johnson and Ferraro (2000) integrate this literature by suggesting that there are two qualitatively distinct forms of IPV: situational couple violence and intimate terrorism (formerly labeled common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism, respectively). The critical difference between these two forms is that situational couple violence emerges sometimes when conflict situations get out of hand, whereas intimate terrorism is perpetrated toward the goal of asserting dominance and control in the relationship. In extreme cases, both forms can lead to injury or even death, although such outcomes are more likely for any given act of intimate terrorism than for any given act of situation couple violence. Intimate terrorism is perpetrated predominantly by men (Johnson, in press), whereas situational couple violence is perpetrated at slightly higher rates by women (Archer, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999). The present chapter addresses situational couple violence, not intimate terrorism. I argue that (1) even “normal” individuals (i.e., those who are neither dominance oriented nor pathological) sometimes experience violent impulses during conflict, and (2) a psychologically plausible model of IPV perpetration will remain elusive until scholars explicitly incorporate the distinction between violent impulses and violent behaviors.

One serious limitation of the existing literature is relevant to the gender issues just discussed: Many scholars’ a priori assumptions of gender differences have caused them to collect data on and to build theoretical models of only male-to-female IPV, generally neglecting female-to-male IPV. Working from the assumption that gender differences must be demonstrated rather than assumed (see Felson,
Over the past several decades, social scientists have presented at least two separate (and largely incompatible) arguments to make the case that the high rates of IPV are perhaps less surprising than they initially appear.¹ The first argument is that individuals learn, via socialization practices, that it is acceptable to engage in violent behavior toward a romantic partner. One variant of this argument, best summarized by the perspective that “the marriage license [is] a hitting license” (Gelles and Straus, 1988, p. 26), suggests that both men and women are socialized to believe that violence is acceptable in romantic relationships. A second variant suggests that only men are socialized to believe that perpetrating violent behavior is acceptable in romantic relationships (e.g., Dobash and Dobash, 1979). This latter variant asserts that socialization practices teach men that they are entitled to exert power over women and that violence is an acceptable means for doing so. From this perspective, IPV is primarily a strategic behavior perpetrated almost exclusively by men and oriented toward the long-term goal of establishing and maintaining dominance and control. Men are socialized to believe that dominating and controlling women with violence (and in other ways) is their right; female violence, in contrast, is used almost exclusively for self-protection (Bograd, 1988; Dobash and Dobash, 1979). Although patriarchal beliefs may well be a risk factor for male IPV, the view that patriarchal socialization is the primary cause of virtually all acts of IPV has begun to crumble under the weight of extensive contradictory evidence (see Dutton and Corvo, 2006; Dutton and Nicholls, 2005).

The second argument to make the case that the high rates of IPV are perhaps less surprising than they initially appear is that the high levels of emotional and behavioral interdependence that characterize most intimate relationships invite unusually high levels of nonviolent conflict, which can on occasion serve as a precursor to violent behavior. In other words, violence is primarily an impulsive behavior that emerges when individuals (either males or females) feel angered or threatened in their relationship. From this perspective, some degree of nonviolent conflict (and the anger and insecurity that can arise from it) is virtually certain to emerge in close, interdependent relationships, and this nonviolent conflict can sometimes boil over into violent conflict (e.g., Felson, 1984; Stets, 1990). Interdependence, which refers to having one’s life circumstances intertwined with another person, can lead to nonviolent conflict in intimate relationships because it increases the likelihood that (1) the partner’s behavior will adversely affect the individual’s well-being (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959), (2) the individual will be vulnerable to emotional pain at the hands of the partner (Holmes, 2002), and (3) individuals will be especially motivated to influence their partner’s behavior (Felson, 2002). The extant corpus of empirical evidence suggests that this interdependence, conflict-based perspective
on IPV accurately describes at least a large proportion of violent acts that men and women commit in their intimate relationships (e.g., ibid.).

**THE I³ MODEL OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE PERPETRATION**

Although experiencing violent impulses certainly increases the probability that individuals will perpetrate IPV, this association of violent impulses with violent behaviors is far from absolute. Under many—likely most—circumstances, violent impulses do not result in violent behaviors. Recent evidence suggests that individuals may be much more likely to override violent impulses in their intimate relationships than in their nonintimate relationships (e.g., Felson, Ackerman, and Yeon, 2003). This evidence contradicts the view that individuals believe that violent behavior is acceptable in such relationships. In short, the same interdependence that may make individuals especially likely to experience strong violent impulses also seems to function on many occasions to strengthen behavioral restraint processes.

How does the preceding analysis dovetail with the extant IPV literature? Researchers have identified dozens of risk factors for, or correlates of, IPV (see Schumacher et al., 2001), but very little conceptual work has been dedicated to understanding the interplay among them (for an exception, see Dutton, 1988), and “theory and research on relationship violence remain uncohesive” (Berscheid and Regan, 2005, p. 52). In an effort to impose enhanced theoretical coherence on the huge number of identified IPV risk factors and to merge together insights from social psychological aggression research and from the IPV literature, I propose in Figure 16.1 the I³ (I-Cubed) Model of IPV Perpetration, which identifies three central questions researchers must ask regarding a given interaction between romantic partners to determine whether IPV is likely to transpire (see Finkel, 2007a, 2007b). First, does at least one partner experience strong instigating triggers? Second, does that partner experience strong violence-impelling forces? And third, is that partner characterized at that time by weak violence-inhibiting forces? If the answer to all three questions is yes, then the individual is likely to perpetrate IPV. The strength of violence-impelling forces is determined by the collective power of the variables that cause the individual to experience action tendencies toward IPV, and the strength of violence-inhibiting forces is determined by the collective power of the variables that cause the individual to override these violence-impelling forces. (The literature on IPV has generally neglected this distinction between risk factors that impel violence and those that disinhibit it.) In addition, violence-impelling and violence-inhibiting forces are only relevant in situations that include an instigating trigger, which refers to a discrete event that prompts rudimentary action tendencies toward IPV.

The structural part of the I³ Model is depicted inside the horizontal rectangle at the bottom of Figure 16.1, whereas illustrative risk factors for strong instigating triggers, strong impelling factors, and weak inhibiting factors (or “disinhibiting risk factors”) are depicted inside the dotted boxes at the top of the figure. The
The placement of a given risk factor into one category does not necessarily preclude its inclusion in a second category (or even in all three categories). The structural part of the I³ Model will remain constant across all theories of IPV, whereas the risk factors part will vary considerably depending upon the specific research questions under investigation. (Although the arrows go from left to right in the structural part of Figure 16.1, no strict temporal order is intended.)

**Instigating Triggers**

The I³ Model applies to a given social interaction between romantic partners and begins at the left of Figure 16.1 with the question of whether at least one partner experiences one or more instigating triggers. Berkowitz’s (1993) cognitive neoassociationistic model of aggressive behavior explored the role of risk factors for the “instigation to aggress” (Berkowitz, 2003, p. 806) and suggests that a broad...
range of aversive events can immediately trigger, potentially via either appraisal or associative processes, aggression-linked cognitive, physiological, and even motor tendencies (a syndrome of affect-related processes that Berkowitz (1993) called “rudimentary anger”). The notion that affective experience can be associated with motor tendencies is consistent with mainstream perspectives on emotion (e.g., Frijda, Kuipers, and ter Schure, 1989); for example, Izard (1991, p. 241) observed that anger is associated with “an impulse to strike out, to attack the source of the anger.” As depicted in Figure 16.1, the I^3 Model categorizes predictors of strong instigating triggers into relational, displaced, and situational risk factors. All of these instigating trigger risk factors include circumstances that the potential perpetrator perceives as provoking or goal obstructing. Those instigating trigger risk factors that are uniquely “relational” include perceived rejection by the partner (e.g., Finkel and Slotter, 2007; Holtzworth-Munroe and Hutchinson, 1993), and those that are uniquely “situational” include aggression-related cues in the immediate environment (e.g., Berkowitz and LePage, 1967).

**Violence-Impelling Forces**

Moving to the right in Figure 16.1, I argue that many of the variables predicting IPV function as risk factors because they amplify the violent tendencies emerging from the instigating triggers into full-fledged violent impulses; that is, these variables serve to moderate the association of the instigating trigger with violent impulses. Sometimes, the violence-related associations emerging in the wake of an instigating trigger will dissipate almost instantaneously. At other times, however, these associations become exacerbated, potentially leading to an intense, full-fledged violent impulse. The middle of the three rectangular boxes at the top of Figure 16.1 presents an illustrative series of risk factors that I hypothesize function by increasing the strength of impelling forces. I divide these risk factors into distal, dispositional, relational, and situational categories (Finkel, 2007a). The distal category encompasses ontogenic factors, cultural and subcultural norms, and socioeconomic and demographic factors. The dispositional category encompasses personal and interpersonal dispositions, biological factors, and attitudes and beliefs that are relatively stable over time. The relational category encompasses characteristics of the romantic relationship that are distinct from each partner’s distal or dispositional characteristics. Finally, the situational category encompasses temporary cognitive, affective, and physiological experiences triggered by aspects of the current situation.

Although Figure 16.1 lists examples of violence-impelling risk factors, I do not provide a detailed overview of them because such treatment is beyond the scope of this chapter and because I provide a more detailed analysis elsewhere (Finkel, 2007a). One violence-impelling risk factor of relevance to the present volume, however, involves the obsessiveness and fear of rejection associated with elevated dispositional attachment anxiety, dispositionally low self-esteem, or experiencing unrequited romantic love (for discussions of these constructs, see Finkel and Slotter, 2007; see also Chapters 2, 4, 5, 8, and 17 in this volume). This obsessiveness and fear of rejection can render individuals vigilant for, and emotionally volatile
(e.g., anger, jealousy) in response to, cues that the partner's dedication to the relationship is less than absolute.

**Violence-Inhibiting Forces**

Moving farther to the right in Figure 16.1, the I³ Model suggests that some of the variables predicting IPV function as risk factors because they weaken the restraining power of violence-inhibiting forces. Weakened violence-inhibiting forces decrease the individual’s likelihood of overriding violent impulses in favor of nonviolent behavior. The right-most of the three rectangular boxes at the top of Figure 16.1 presents an illustrative series of risk factors that I hypothesize function by weakening the strength of violence-inhibiting forces. I once again divide these risk factors into distal, dispositional, relational, and situational categories (Finkel, 2007a). I suggest that these violence-inhibiting forces function as thresholds (see Fals-Stewart, Leonard, and Birchler, 2005). If the violent impulses formed by the interaction of the instigating trigger with the violence-impelling factors exceed the relevant threshold, the individual will perpetrate IPV; if they do not, the individual will override the violent impulses in favor of nonviolent behavior. Although Figure 16.1 lists examples of violence-impelling risk factors, I do not provide a detailed overview of them (see Finkel, 2007a). One set of violence-impelling risk factors of relevance to the present chapter, however, involves low dispositional self-control and current self-regulatory strength. Later, I present results from a study exploring the association of low self-control with IPV perpetration.

The preceding discussion was intended to introduce the I³ Model and to provide a brief illustration of its potential power to impose theoretical coherence on established risk factors for aggression in general and for IPV in particular. Before concluding this discussion of the I³ Model, I emphasize that one of its strengths is that it facilitates the cross-fertilization of ideas between the IPV literature and the flourishing literature on self-regulation (see Baumeister and Vohs, 2004). Any time individuals want to override an impulse, they invoke self-regulatory processes. Such processes are frequently relevant in those moments leading up to acts of IPV but have been largely neglected by IPV researchers.

**SELF-REGULATION AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

That partners sometimes experience violent impulses toward one another without these impulses resulting in violent behaviors is, I suggest, a common phenomenon that has been largely neglected in the IPV literature. The occasional violent impulse toward a romantic partner may not be experienced exclusively by patriarchal or pathologically deviant men (Finkel et al., 2007). I suggest that many individuals, both men and women, experience violent impulses toward their partner on occasion. Fortunately, these individuals are frequently able to manage such impulses without them leading to violent behaviors. A more complete
understanding of IPV will likely emerge if scientists devote greater attention to understanding the mechanisms by which individuals refrain from perpetrating IPV when such impulses arise.

Although the I3 Model immediately presents a slew of testable hypotheses, perhaps its most novel feature is the claim that violence-inhibiting forces are crucial in determining whether a given instigating trigger leads an individual to perpetrate IPV. This claim may seem relatively straightforward to social psychologists steeped in the self-regulation literature, but I emphasize again that it has been largely ignored in the IPV literature. Scholars have on occasion recognized that “impulsivity” is an important correlate of IPV perpetration (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe et al., 2000), but these impulsivity measures do not establish whether the impulsive tendencies are caused by (1) the inability to restrain impulses of a given strength or (2) the presence of extremely powerful impulses that would be difficult for anybody to restrain. In contrast, this distinction is essential to the I3 Model. And I underscore that even those individuals who generally believe (especially when queried in a cool cognitive state) that perpetrating IPV is unacceptable are susceptible to experiencing violent impulses toward their partner on occasion.

A REVIEW OF THE EMERGING EVIDENCE LINKING SELF-REGULATION TO REDUCED IPV TENDENCIES

I hypothesize that diverse self-regulatory factors function by modulating the strength of violence-inhibiting forces. As such, these factors are crucial in determining whether individuals experiencing violent impulses toward their partner will follow through with violent behaviors. A series of five recent studies has investigated the role of several of these factors in strengthening violence-inhibiting forces (Finkel et al., 2007). This research builds on programs of research demonstrating that low self-control predicts (1) diminished tendencies toward prorelationship behavior in response to potentially destructive partner behavior (Finkel and Campbell, 2001) and (2) aggressive behavior toward strangers (DeWall et al., 2007). Although these previous studies did not examine IPV, they indicate the self-regulation is relevant for predicting how individuals behave during romantic relationship conflict and in response to provocation by strangers.

Study 1: Low Dispositional Self-Control

One factor that we (Finkel et al., 2007) hypothesized would influence self-regulatory restraints on violent impulses is whether potential perpetrators are characterized by weak versus strong dispositional self-control. In Study 1, we predicted IPV perpetration from male and female adolescents’ \( N = 813 \) dispositional self-control. An initial analysis revealed a strong correlation between current reports of participants’ dispositional self-control (e.g., “I often act on the spur of the moment without stopping to think”) and their reports of perpetrating violent behaviors against romantic partners (e.g., “scratch him/her,” “hit him/her with my
over the preceding 12 months: Low self-control predicted greater IPV. More importantly, an additional analysis revealed that low self-control predicted greater tendencies toward IPV over the ensuing year, controlling for IPV tendencies over the previous year.

**Study 2: Impulses versus Behaviors**

Although the Study 1 findings indicate the low self-control predicts elevated tendencies toward IPV perpetration—and toward increases in such behavior over time—it does not provide especially compelling evidence for the importance of violence-inhibiting forces. After all, it is possible that low self-control predicts IPV because it leads people to experience especially strong violent impulses (rather than especially weak tendencies to override these impulses). In Studies 2 through 5, we (Finkel et al., 2007) strived acquire more direct evidence for the importance of violence-inhibiting factors per se.

The goal of Study 2 (Finkel et al., 2007) was simply to establish empirically that individuals involved in a serious fight with a romantic partner tend to experience violent impulses that are stronger than their violent behaviors manifest. Such results would provide compelling initial support for the notion that IPV would be much more common in the absence of self-regulatory processes. In Study 2, male and female participants ($N = 81$) brought to mind as vividly as they could “the most serious argument or fight” they had ever experienced with their current romantic partner. After writing about the incident, participants reported on nine-point scales (anchored at “not at all” and “extremely”) both (1) the extent to which they were tempted to enact a series of violent behaviors toward their partner and (2) the extent to which they actually perpetrated these behaviors. These behaviors were the same ones employed in Study 1. A repeated-measures $t$-test revealed that participants experienced significantly stronger IPV impulses than IPV behaviors, suggesting that impulse-override processes are indeed important in helping individuals avoid acting upon their impulses toward IPV.

**Study 3: The Importance of Cognitive Processing Time**

A second factor that we (Finkel et al., 2007) hypothesized would influence self-regulatory restraints on violent impulses is whether potential perpetrators respond to provocation immediately or after a brief delay. In Study 3, we employed a sophisticated and well-validated procedure (the “articulated thoughts in simulated situations,” or ATSS, procedure) that in an ethical manner enables researchers to expose participants to well-controlled but experientially impactful partner provocations (Eckhardt, Barbour, and Davison, 1998). Although the ATSS uses hypothetical situations, its lengthy and personally involving scenarios, which are interspersed with think-aloud procedures, allow for far greater ecological validity than do most scenario procedures. In this study, male and female participants ($N = 46$) who were involved in dating relationships of at least four months in duration listened to (and were instructed to immerse themselves psychologically in) provocative simulated situations in which their partner engaged
in behavior that was likely to be jealousy provoking and even disrespectful to the participant. In one scenario, participants overheard their partner having a flirtatious conversation at a bar. In another, participants overheard their partner sitting on a couch with an opposite-sex stranger and exchanging erotic-sounding backrubs; it also involved the partner criticizing the participant to the stranger. By random assignment, half of the participants provided a 30-second verbal response to each segment of each scenario immediately after the tape stopped; the other half did so after a 10-second delay.

Adapting procedures from Eckhardt and colleagues (1998), we (Finkel et al., 2007) trained coders to rate, among other constructs, the degree to which participants articulated physically and psychologically aggressive thoughts toward their partner. Results revealed that participants who were assigned to the condition in which they began verbalizing their thoughts immediately after the end of each segment were significantly more likely to verbalize aggressive tendencies than were those assigned to the condition in which they waited for 10 seconds before verbalizing their thoughts. In conjunction with the evidence that (1) adolescents characterized by low levels of dispositional self-control became more violent over time relative to those characterized by high self-control (Study 1) and (2) participants experience stronger impulses toward violence during relationship conflict than their behavior manifests (Study 2), the Study 3 results provide good support for the notion that immediate responses to provocative partner behavior are much more likely to be violent than are delayed responses, even if the delay is only 10 seconds.

Study 4: Ego Depletion

A third factor that we hypothesized would influence self-regulatory restraints on violent impulses is whether potential perpetrators have had their self-control strength temporarily depleted. Scholars in the self-regulation tradition have distinguished between two forms of self-control: (1) dispositional self-control; and (2) in-the-moment ego strength (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000). Dispositional self-control (see Study 2) is a stable personality trait assessing the degree to which individuals are able to control their impulses across time and situations (Caspi, 2000; Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone, 2004). Ego strength (also called “self-regulatory strength”) represents an individual’s ability to control impulses at a particular time and in a particular situation. Ego strength is a limited, depletable, and renewable resource; it is influenced by situational factors such as stress, exhaustion, or overexertion of willpower, which can leave the individual in a state of ego depletion. Baumeister and colleagues advanced a “strength model” of self-regulation, proposing that “a person can become exhausted from many simultaneous demands and so will sometimes fail at self-control even regarding things at which he or she would otherwise succeed” (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000, p. 3; see also Baumeister et al., 1998; Finkel et al., 2006; Vohs and Schmeichel, 2003). As such, when their ego strength is depleted, it should be more difficult for individuals to move beyond their violent impulses during conflictual interaction with their partner because they possess fewer resources to inhibit them.
In Study 4 (Finkel et al., 2007), we extended the previous studies by (1) providing an experimental test of the hypothesis that low self-control (operationalized in terms of depleted self-regulatory resources) causes IPV following provocation and (2) employing a behavioral, laboratory-analog measure of IPV. Male and female participants \( (N = 33 \) heterosexual couples) who were involved in dating relationships of at least four months in duration went through all laboratory procedures in a room by themselves. In a \( 2 \times 2 \) design, they were first assigned either to a depleting or a nondepleting attention control task before their partner (ostensibly) either provoked them by evaluating them negatively and being potentially selfish or did not provoke them.

The analog IPV measure—a new measure developed for this study—was the duration for which participants assigned their partner to maintain physically uncomfortable bodily poses. The experimenter informed participants that they would complete a two-person task with their partner in which one person (the “actor”) would maintain a series of uncomfortable poses and the other (the “director”) would determine how many poses their partner must complete and for how long he or she must hold them. A rigged drawing “randomly” assigned all participants to the director role. The experimenter informed participants that the poses tend to be physically uncomfortable but that they do not cause long-term physical damage. This procedure, therefore, allowed participants to inflict physical pain on their partner.

Results revealed a significant interaction effect, such that participants who previously had been provoked by their partner assigned him or her to maintain the painful body positions for longer durations than did those who had not been provoked previously—but only if they were depleted. Nondepleted participants who had been provoked assigned durations that were comparable to those who had not been provoked. In short, it was the combination of being depleted and being provoked that caused participants to inflict more intense physical pain on their partners.

**Study 5: Ego Bolstering**

A fourth factor that we (Finkel et al., 2007) hypothesized would influence self-regulatory restraints on violent impulses—one that is in many ways a complement to the ego-depletion factor we investigated in Study 4—is whether potential perpetrators have recently had their self-control strength bolstered. The susceptibility to ego depletion is but one of the implications of the strength model of self-regulation (Muraven and Baumeister, 2000). A second implication is that reliably exerting self-regulation can over time increase one’s self-regulatory strength. As with a muscle, intensive exertion (e.g., adhering to a new resolution to skip dessert) depletes self-regulatory resources in the short run, but a regimen of consistent use over time (e.g., waking up daily at 5:30 a.m. to take advantage of early-morning writing time) ultimately bolsters self-regulatory strength. Adhering to such a regimen should result in superior behavioral restraint and enhanced likelihood of avoiding violent behavior when one experiences violent impulses. Compelling studies by Oaten and Cheng (2006a, 2006b, 2007; also see Muraven, Baumeister, and Tice, 1999) suggested that bolstering ego strength may indeed be possible. These
authors repeatedly demonstrated that assigning people to a two-month self-control strengthening “regimen” causes them to gain better control over diverse aspects of their lives (e.g., cutting down on impulsive spending; healthier eating habits) and to become resilient to laboratory-based ego depletion. Their studies suggested that self-regulation functions like a muscle that can be strengthened through sustained self-regulatory exertion over time. We applied this approach to the study of IPV.

In Study 5 (Finkel et al., 2007), we investigated the effects on IPV tendencies of assigning participants to experiencing an ego-strengthening manipulation. We ran this study for both theoretical and practical reasons. For example, it is worth noting that although the findings from Study 4 are certainly intriguing, their practical value are somewhat limited; after all, who wants to develop manipulations that make people more violent toward their partner? To be sure, training individuals to recognize that they are experiencing depletion could help them become vigilant at those times to avoid heated arguments. But what if it were possible to employ an experimental manipulation not to deplete ego strength, but to bolster it?

Male and female participants (N = 40) who were involved in dating relationships of at least four months in duration participated in two laboratory sessions two weeks apart. At each session, all participants first experienced an ego-depleting attention-control task (the same one employed in Study 4) before completing a self-report measure of IPV propensity toward one’s partner. At the end of the first laboratory session, participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions relevant to the two-week period between the laboratory sessions. Two of these conditions involved interventions previously demonstrated to bolster ego strength over time, whereas the third served as a no-intervention control condition. In the first ego-strengthening manipulation, participants exerted themselves daily to use their nondominant hand in everyday tasks (e.g., eating). In the second, they exerted themselves daily to regulate certain aspects of their habitual speech processes (e.g., not saying the word “yeah”).

The IPV propensity measure participants completed after the attention-control depletion task at each laboratory session was a modified version of the Proximal Antecedents to Violent Episodes (PAVE) scale (Babcock et al., 2004). Participants indicated on a nine-point scale how likely it is that they would become “physically aggressive” in response to each of 20 situations (e.g., “My partner ridicules or makes fun of me”). To make these scenarios as impactful as possible, the experimenter encouraged participants to get a vivid mental image of each situation. The results came out as predicted: A significant Time × Condition interaction effect revealed that participants assigned to each of the ego-strengthening conditions exhibited a significant decline in their IPV tendencies from the Time 1 to the Time 2 session, whereas those assigned to the no-intervention control condition exhibited no change over time (with virtually identical means at both sessions).

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

IPV can lead to a whole host of negative outcomes, ranging from injury or even death at the individual level to relationship breakup at the relationship level.
More generally, it can result in considerable adverse consequences for individuals, couples, families, and societies. I have proposed the I3 Model to (1) impose enhanced theoretical coherence on the IPV literature and (2) emphasize the importance of self-regulatory processes in helping potential perpetrators refrain from engaging in violent behaviors, even when they are experiencing violent impulses during relationship conflict. I summarized results from five studies intended to put claims from the I3 Model about the importance of self-regulatory processes in IPV perpetration on more solid empirical footing.

It may be time to incorporate self-regulation training as a central aspect of clinical interventions for IPV. Extant interventions for IPV perpetrators, which are notoriously ineffective (for reviews, see Babcock, Green, and Robie, 2004; Dutton and Corvo, 2006), generally do not emphasize self-regulation or violence-inhibiting processes. Fortunately, training people to restrain their impulses is more likely to be successful than training them not to experience those impulses in the first place (Baumeister, 2005), and findings from the proposed research could ultimately promote restraint-oriented interventions to decrease the prevalence and severity of IPV.

REFERENCES


**ENDNOTES**

1. A third argument, albeit a less mainstream one, suggests that evolutionary pressures have provided a survival advantage to men who were violent toward their mating partners because this violence helped to provide them with exclusive control over their partners’ reproductive capacity, a survival advantage that has left present-day
men with a genetic proclivity toward IPV (Daly and Wilson, 1988). A fourth argument, espoused largely by clinical psychologists (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe and Stuart, 1994) and potentially related to the two arguments discussed in the text, suggests that certain individuals are characterized by clinical disorders (e.g., borderline or antisocial personality disorder) and that these disorders make them more likely to perpetrate IPV.

2. There is a substantial and nuanced controversy in the literatures on emotion and aggression pertaining to whether (and the degree to which) affective and aggressive processes can occur associatively (i.e., without requiring cognitive appraisal processes). Addressing this controversy is beyond the scope of the present chapter.
INTRODUCTION

Discerning the quality of another’s caring is a preoccupying goal in romantic life. Petals are plucked off daisies, and innocuous events, such as a glance, frown, or smile, are imbued with meaning in the hopes of discerning whether another truly cares. Such attentiveness to the evidence is not surprising given the unique interdependence dilemma posed by romantic relationships. Risking thoughts and
behaviors that increase closeness necessarily increases both the likelihood and pain of rejection. Imagine that Sally has a bad day at work and comes to Harry for consolation. Her willingness to seek support is critical for establishing satisfying interactions, but in seeking support, she risks Harry’s criticism or rebuff. Moreover, the long-term pain of rejection only increases the more Sally comes to depend on Harry for comfort.

Given the pain of rejection and relationship loss (Baumeister and Leary, 1995), people should be motivated to think and behave in ways that minimize dependence on the partner and, consequently, the likelihood of being hurt (Murray, Holmes, and Collins, 2006). However, people need to risk substantial dependence (Kelley, 1979) to establish the kind of satisfying relationship that can fulfill basic needs for connection (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). They need to behave in ways that give a partner power over their outcomes and to think in ways that invest great importance in the relationship (Gagne and Lydon, 2004; Murray, 1999). For instance, people in satisfying relationships excuse their partner’s bad behavior (Rusbult et al., 1991). They also respond to their partner’s needs as they arise and, trustingly, leave the timing of repayment up to the partner (Clark and Grote, 1998).

The coincident need to risk and protect against rejection creates a basic dilemma of interdependence. The thoughts and behaviors that are critical for establishing satisfying close connections with others increase both the short-term risk of rejection and the long-term pain of rejection. This chapter extends a recent model of risk regulation developed to explain how people negotiate the resulting conflict between the goal of seeking connection and the goal of protecting against rejection (Murray, Holmes, and Collins, 2006).

**BALANCING CONNECTEDNESS AND SELF-PROTECTION GOALS**

Situations of dependence are fundamental to romantic life. One partner’s actions constrain the other’s capacity to satisfy important needs and goals. Such dependence is evident from the lowest to the highest level of generality. At the level of specific situations, couples are interdependent in multiple ways, ranging from deciding whose movie preference to favor on a given weekend to deciding what constitutes a fair allocation of household chores. At a broader level, couples must negotiate different personalities, such as merging one partner’s laissez-faire nature with the other’s more controlled style (Kelley, 1979).

It is situations such as these—situations where the partner’s responsiveness to one’s needs is in question—that routinely activate the risk of rejection in interpersonal life. Take the mundane example of a couple trying to decide whether to go to the current blockbuster action film or a contemplative arts film. Imagine that Sally confides to Harry that she believes seeing the action film will help distract her from work worries, concerns that she fears the arts film Harry wants to see will compound. In making this request, Sally is putting her psychological welfare
in Harry’s hands. Like most situations where sacrifice on Harry’s part is required, she risks discovering that Harry is not willing to be responsive to her needs.

Given multiple layers of interdependence, people routinely find themselves in situations where they need to choose how much vulnerability (and thus how much potential for rejection) they safely can risk (Kelley, 1979). Throughout the course of the relationship, partners need to make iterative and often implicit choices between seeking connection (increasing dependence) and self-protection (decreasing dependence). Consequently, to risk being in the relationship, people need a system in place that functions to keep them feeling reasonably safe in a context of continued vulnerability (Murray, Holmes, and Collins, 2006).

The goal of the risk regulation system is to optimize the sense of assurance that is possible given one’s relationship circumstances (Murray, Holmes, and Collins, 2006). This sense of assurance is experienced as a sense of safety in one’s level of dependence in the relationship—a feeling of relative invulnerability to hurt. To optimize assurance, this system functions dynamically, shifting the priority given to the goals of seeking closeness and protecting against rejection so as to minimize the perceived risks of rejection. (See Chapter 13 in this volume for a related discussion of how approach and avoidance social goals affect attention, perception, and behavior.)

Figure 17.1 illustrates the operation of this system. Situations that involve interpersonal risk and vulnerability automatically activate the appetitive goal of seeking connection (Path A) and the aversive goal of protecting against rejection (Path B). The appetitive link between risk and connectedness goals (Path A) reflects the functionalist argument that the best means of managing a capricious and dangerous world is to seek connection to others who will be motivated to meet one’s needs. This assumption is consistent with models of attachment (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003; see also Chapter 4 in this volume), interdependence (Kelley, 1979), self-esteem (Leary and Baumeister, 2000), and evolutionary models of love (see Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume) and altruism and social exchange (Tooby and Cosmides, 1996).

Recent research in my laboratory (Murray et al., 2007) supports the proposition that making the general risks of interdependence salient activates connectedness goals. People primed to think of a time when a significant other disappointed them were quicker to identify words associated with seeking connection (e.g., approach, vow, forgive) in a lexical decision task (Experiment 1). They also reported stronger desires to focus on the positive aspects of their relationships (Experiment 2). Research on attachment also supports this proposition. Indirectly priming vulnerability by priming failure-related thoughts activates the goal of seeking proximity to others (Mikulincer et al., 2000) and increases the accessibility of the partner’s name (Mikulincer, Gillath, and Shaver, 2002).

The aversive links between risk and self-protection (Path B) and connectedness and self-protection goals (Path C) reflect the reality that others are not always likely to be equally motivated to tend to one’s needs. Some others, such as those that have been the source of past hurts, might be motivated to thwart one’s needs. Certain situations, such as conflict of interests, are also riskier than others. In such situations, even generally responsive others might be unwilling to meet one’s
needs. Certain people, such as those low in self-esteem (Murray et al., 2002), high in attachment anxiety (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2003), or high in rejection sensitivity (Downey and Feldman, 1996), are also more easily hurt by another’s inattentiveness to their needs. For these reasons, risk and the consequent desire to seek connection should also activate the goal of self-protection.

In fact, Leary and Baumeister (2000) argued that avoiding rejection is so important that the self-system evolved to gauge rejection threats. They argued that self-esteem is a “sociometer” that measures a person’s perceived likelihood of being accepted by others and regulates behavior. In this metric, painful drops in self-esteem signal the possibility of rejection and motivate people to avoid hurtful situations (MacDonald and Leary, 2005). Consistent with this logic, ostracism by strangers or anticipating a future absent of social connection decreases people’s willingness to put themselves in situations where they might be vulnerable to others. Such experiences both decrease people’s willingness to sacrifice their own interests to benefit others (Twenge et al., 2007) and increase people’s tendency to aggress against offending others (Twenge et al., 2001).

The moderating path (Path D) linking the immediacy of the threat to goal strength illustrates the assumption that risks that stem directly from one’s partner’s actions are likely to strengthen the activation of self-protection concerns (see Chapter 18 in this volume). Imagine that Harry’s best friend broke a promise to him—a threat that is less immediate in nature because it arises from the external interpersonal world. Such an experience should heighten feelings of vulnerability and increase his desire to approach his spouse, Sally, for comfort (Bowlby, 1982). Now imagine that it’s Sally who broke a promise—a more immediate threat. In this situation, the desire to approach Sally for comfort is likely to be tinged with greater apprehension. Consistent with this logic, even high self-esteem people (who are not normally troubled by rejection concerns) are quicker to identify self-protection words (e.g., protect, defense, caution) in a lexical decision task when they had just been reminded of a partner transgression they had not forgiven (Murray et al., 2007, Experiment 7).
Once activated, either directly (Path B) or indirectly (Path C), the goal of protecting the self against rejection then triggers an executive control system (Path E). This corrective system functions as a “stop/go” routine—one that resolves the conflict between connectedness and self-protection goals by helping people identify which specific situations should be avoided and which situations are safe to approach. The rules serving this directive function involve the following:

1. An “appraisal” rule that links situations of risk to the goal of gauging a partner’s responsiveness in that situation (Path F).
2. A “signaling” rule that links perceptions of a partner’s acceptance or rejection in these situations to the experience of gratified or hurt feelings and coincident gains or losses in self-esteem (Path G).
3. A “behavioral response” rule that links perceptions of a partner’s acceptance or rejection to the decision to approach or avoid dependence (Path H).

These rules operate in concert to prioritize self-protection goals (and the assurance that comes from distance) when the perceived risks of rejection are high or connectedness goals (and the assurance that comes from closeness) when the perceived risks of rejection are low.

**Appraisal Rules**

Appraisal rules abstract inferences about a partner’s responsiveness from the ongoing stream of events. They take the form “if risky situation, then gauge acceptance or rejection” (Path F). For people to pursue connectedness goals in risky situations, their interpretation of events must provide reason to trust in the partner’s responsiveness to need (Reis, Clark, and Holmes, 2004; Tooby and Cosmides, 1996). The experiences that afford optimistic expectations about responsiveness likely vary across situations, relationships, and perhaps cultures. However, the common diagnostic that affords confidence in a partner’s responsiveness is the perception that a partner perceives qualities in one worth valuing—qualities that are not readily available in others, making one worth the sacrifice. In independent cultures, this sense of confidence requires the inference that a partner perceives valued traits in the self (Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 2000). In interdependent cultures, this sense of confidence requires the further inference that a partner’s family also values one’s traits (MacDonald and Jessica, 2006).

**Signaling Rules**

Signaling rules imbue discrepancies between current and desired appraisals of a partner’s regard with affect (Berscheid, 1983). They take the form “if accepted or rejected, then internalize” (Path G). Perceiving rejection or drops in a partner’s acceptance or admiration hurts and threatens people’s desired conceptions of themselves as being worthy of interpersonal connection (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). In contrast, perceiving acceptance or gains in a partner’s acceptance or
admiration affirms and bolsters people’s overall sense of self-worth. Thus, for people to pursue connectedness goals in risky situations, the prospect of approaching a specific partner should affirm rather than threaten the self.

**Behavioral Response Rules**

Behavioral response rules turn the perception of acceptance or rejection and coincident gains or losses in self-esteem into action. They take the form “if feeling accepted/affirmed or rejected/hurt, then regulate dependence” (Path H). Specifically, behavioral response rules operate to ensure that people only risk as much future dependence as they feel is reasonably safe given recent experience.

When a partner’s general regard is in question, and rejection seems more likely, people tread cautiously, reserve judgment, and limit future dependence on the partner. In interactions with a romantic partner, a first line of defense might involve limiting the situations people are willing to enter within their relationships—becoming less willing to seek support, to disclose, or to respond communally to the partner’s needs. A second line of defense might involve shifting the symbolic value attached to the relationship itself—derogating the partner’s traits or devaluing the importance of intimacy. However, when confident of a partner’s general regard, people can more safely risk increased dependence in the future—entering into situations where the partner has control over their immediate outcomes, forgiving transgressions, attaching greater value to their partner’s qualities. Suggesting that feelings acceptance by others automatically triggers connectedness-seeking, unconsciously primed words that connote security (e.g., accepted) heighten empathy for others (Mikulincer et al., 2001), diminish people’s tendency to derogate outgroup members (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2001), and increase people’s desire to seek support from others in dealing with a personal crisis (Pierce and Lydon, 1998).

**HOW PERCEIVED REGARD CONTROLS RULE SENSITIVITY**

For the risk regulation system to be functional, it needs to adapt itself to suit specific relationship circumstances. If Sally generally perceives Harry to be responsive to her needs, distancing herself from Harry at the first sign of his insensitivity is not likely to be the optimal means of sustaining the needed sense of assurance. However, if Sally generally perceives Harry to be unresponsive, such a response might be Sally’s best available means of sustaining some minimal sense of safety from harm. Accordingly, to respond dynamically and efficiently to ongoing events, the risk assessment system depicted in Figure 17.1 needs a heuristic means of estimating the level of risk inherent in specific situations.

The moderating path (Path I) linking perceived regard to the operation of the control system illustrates how this calibration process occurs (Murray, Holmes, and Collins, 2006). Perceptions of a partner’s acceptance—expectations that reflect properties of a person’s general disposition and specific relationship
experiences—interact with specific features of the event to control the sensitivity of the appraisal, signaling, and behavioral response rules people adopt in specific situations (see Chapter 11 in this volume for a discussion of the developmental origins of relationship expectations).

For people who generally feel less valued by their partner, the risk regulation system should have a lower threshold for activation, and when operative, it should generally prioritize self-protection goals. In contrast, for people who generally feel more valued by their partner, the risk regulation should have a higher threshold for activation, and when operative, it should generally prioritize connectedness goals. Consequently, when vulnerability and risk activate the goal of seeking connection, people who generally feel more valued by their partner should be more likely to actualize or execute this goal than people who feel less valued. Why would this be the case?

When Self-Protection Goals Trump Connectedness Goals

General expectations of rejection, such as those embodied in attachment anxiety or low self-esteem, make specific rejection experiences all the more painful and motivating (Leary and Baumeister, 2000; Nezlek et al., 1997). For people who generally feel less positively regarded by a specific partner (i.e., lows), situated rejection experiences hurt more because they pose a greater proportional loss to a more precarious, generalized sense of their worthiness of interpersonal connection. Accordingly, they are in need of a risk regulation system that prioritizes self-protection goals (Higgins, 1996)—one that quickly detects rejection (“if risky situation, then perceive rejection”), strongly signals the possibility of further hurt (“if rejected, then internalize”), and motivates them to take defensive action sooner rather than later (“if rejected, then limit dependence”). Such a system best affords lows some minimal sense of continued assurance in the relationship.

Appraisal Rules Imagine that Sally gets criticized at work for failing to complete a project. Such situations activate the attachment system and the need to seek another’s literal or symbolic validation (Collins and Feeney, 2000). However, if Sally questions Harry’s ongoing positive regard, she may be reluctant to disclose her personal failing for fear he might be disparaging of her. Instead, such a situation may activate “if–then” contingencies that link her failures to Harry’s likely rejection. Consistent with this logic, people who are low in self-esteem—that is, people who generally doubt the acceptance of others—see interpersonal acceptance as conditional in nature (Baldwin and Sinclair, 1996). For instance, low self-esteem dating intimates react to induced doubts about their intelligence or considerateness by expressing greater concerns about their partner’s likely rejection (Murray et al., 1998). Similarly, in a daily diary study conducted in my laboratory (Murray et al., 2006), low self-esteem married women (incorrectly) perceived their husband as more rejection on days when these women experienced more than their usual level of failure at work.

Now imagine that Sally comes home to find Harry in an irritable mood, grumbling about the lack of food in the fridge and the fact that Sally had promised
to replenish the fridge’s contents by day’s end. If Sally generally feels less valued by Harry, she may have difficulty attributing such negative events to some specific feature of the situation, such as his fatigue. Instead, Sally may attribute such grumbling to an interpersonal disposition—his broader displeasure with her. In the daily diary study, married intimates who generally felt less valued by their partner felt more rejected on days after their partner had just been in a bad mood, a mood that had nothing to do with them or the relationship (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). People who are less trusting of their partner’s responsiveness also react to reminders of past transgressions by perceiving more hurtful intent in the discussion of a current problem (Holmes and Rempel, 1989).

Research utilizing dispositional proxies for perceptions of a specific partner’s regard yields parallel results. For instance, dating intimates who doubt their partner’s regard due to low self-esteem overinterpret their dating partner’s hypothetical negative moods, seeing them as symptomatic of their partner’s ill feelings toward them (Bellavia and Murray, 2003). Low, but not high, self-esteem people also react to experimentally-induced signs of a partner’s irritation by anticipating rejection (Murray et al., 2002). Dating intimates who are high on attachment-related anxiety about acceptance (and who are likely to question their specific partner’s acceptance) interpret a partner’s misdeeds in suspicious ways that are likely to exacerbate hurt feelings (Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996). They also interpret daily conflicts as a sign of their partner’s waning commitment (Campbell et al., 2005), and they even interpret a partner’s ambiguous attempts to be supportive as intentionally hurtful (Collins and Feeney, 2004).

**Signaling Rules**  People who generally feel less valued by their romantic partner are also readily hurt by rejection, reflecting the operation of a highly sensitive signaling system. In the diary study, global perceptions of the spouse’s regard determined how much daily concerns about a partner’s rejection deflated state self-esteem (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). People who generally felt less positively regarded by their partner felt worse about themselves on days after they experienced greater than usual levels of anxiety about their partner’s acceptance (as compared with low anxiety days). In a conceptually parallel experiment, low self-esteem dating intimates responded to induced fears that their partner perceived important faults in them by questioning their own self-worth (Murray et al., 2002, Experiment 3).

**Behavioral Response Rules**  The existing evidence further suggests that people who feel less valued by their partner respond to perceived rejections by reducing interdependence, thereby thwarting connectedness goals. Specifically, people who generally feel less valued, such as those low in self-esteem, respond to risk by diminishing their partner’s value, thereby giving the partner less potential power to hurt them.

For instance, people with low self-esteem have been found to respond to induced anxieties about their partner’s possible rejection by depending less on their partner as a source of self-esteem and comfort (Murray et al., 1998). They also evaluated
their partner’s qualities more negatively (Murray et al., 1998; Murray et al., 2002). These devaluing processes also emerge whether these acute rejection anxieties are imagined in response to a newly discovered fault in the self (Murray et al., 1998) or arise in response to the partner’s behavior (Murray et al., 2002). In the daily diary study (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003), people who generally felt less positively regarded responded to feeling acutely rejected one day by behaving in more cold and critical ways toward their partner the next day. These reactions emerged even though the partners of people who felt less valued were not actually upset with them when lows felt most rejected.

Other research further illustrates how risky situations activate distancing attempts for people who generally feel less valued by a specific partner. Women higher in attachment-related anxiety display greater anger toward their partner in a situation in which their partner may not have been as responsive as they hoped (Rholes, Simpson, and Oriña, 1999). After discussing a serious relationship problem, more anxiously attached men and women also reported greater anger and hostility (as compared with controls who discussed a minor problem) and they downplayed their feelings of closeness and commitment (Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996). People high on attachment-related anxiety also react to higher levels of daily conflict by minimizing their feelings of closeness to their partner (Campbell et al., 2005). Moreover, women high on chronic rejection sensitivity responded to a potential partner’s disinterest by evaluating that partner more negatively (Ayduk et al., 1999). They were also more likely to initiate conflicts on days after they felt rejected by their romantic partner (ibid.).

**When Connectedness Goals Trump Self-Protection Goals**

For people who generally feel more positively regarded by a specific partner (i.e., highs), there is little need for such an easily activated and self-protectively calibrated risk regulation system. For them, specific rejections pose a smaller proportional loss to a comparably rich resource. Instead, the goal of maintaining the desired level of confidence in the partner’s positive regard and caring is likely to prevail (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). A control system that functions to prioritize connectedness goals better affords people who generally feel more valued a continued sense of assurance or safety in the relationship.

In appraising the meaning of specific situations of dependence, people who generally feel more positively regarded should set a high threshold for detecting rejection. In fact, specific situations of risk should activate “if–then” contingencies that link potential threats to motivated cognitive processes that bolster and protect perceptions of the partner’s acceptance and caring (“if dependent, then perceive acceptance”). Even when highs feel rejected, general expectations of partner acceptance should dull the sting of specific hurts (“if rejected, then resist internalizing”), protecting self-esteem from most rejection experiences. General expectations of acceptance should even give highs reason to believe that seeking greater closeness to the partner will minimize the likelihood of future hurts (“if rejected, then increase interdependence”).
Appraisal Rules   Rather than being quick to perceive rejection, people who feel more valued by their partner react to risky situations by affirming their partner’s acceptance and love. For instance, high self-esteem participants reacted to failure on a purported test of intelligence by exaggerating their partner’s love (Murray et al., 1998). In the diary study, people who generally believed their spouse regarded them more positively actually felt more loved and accepted on days after they felt badly about themselves, and thus, needed to perceive reassurance (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). People who felt more positively regarded by their spouse even felt more loved and accepted by their partner on days after they reported more than their usual amount of conflict or negative partner behavior (and thus had greater actual reason to distrust their partner).

Signaling Rules   Because general feelings of confidence in a partner’s positive regard and acceptance blunt the sting of specific rejections, there is little need for a strong signaling system. Instead, for highs, situated feelings about their own worth should be reasonably immune to perceived rejections. Consistent with this logic, anxieties about a partner’s rejection do not diminish state self-esteem for people who generally feel more valued by their partner (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). Moreover, the possibility of a dating partner’s annoyance or irritation does not trigger acute self-doubts among high self-esteem people (Murray et al., 2002).

Behavioral Response Rules   For people who feel more positively regarded, perceiving acute rejections motivates interdependence increasing behaviors, fostering the realization of connectedness goals. When primed with the general risks of depending on another, high self-esteem people report greater willingness to enter risky, interdependent situations with their dating partner, such as seeking support or giving their partner decision-making power (Murray et al., 2007, Experiment 2). Dating intimates with high self-esteem also react to induced self-doubts by reporting greater dependence on their partner’s reassurance as a source of self-esteem (Murray et al., 1998). They even respond to induced concerns about their dating partner’s likely annoyance with them by reporting greater feelings of closeness to that same partner (Murray et al., 2002, Experiment 2). In the daily diary study, married intimates who generally felt more positively regarded actually drew closer to their partner on days after they felt most rejected (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). Similarly, people low on attachment-related anxiety come to value their partner more after discussing a serious than a minor conflict (Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips, 1996).

**DOES RISK REGULATION INVOLVE AN EXECUTIVE CONTROL SYSTEM?**

Does risk regulation involve an executive control system—one that is brought on line with the activation of connectedness goals? If it does, a number of consequences should follow. First, activating the general goal of approaching a desired state should
activate the signature style underlying that person’s control system. Accordingly, for people prone to distrust a specific partner’s regard, priming approach goals should result in a pattern of automatic (i.e., uncontrolled) associations that reflect the desire to connect and avowed (i.e., controlled) intentions that reflect the need to self-protect. In a sense, the heart seeks closeness, whereas the mind resists it. However, priming approach goals should result in consistent controlled and uncontrolled responses for people prone to trust a specific partner’s regard.

To examine these hypotheses, my laboratory conducted an experiment (Murray et al., 2007, Experiment 4) in which we subliminally primed approach goals (using a word categorization task). We then measured positive implicit associations to one’s dating partner and explicit reports of closeness. As expected, low self-esteem people primed with approach goals were quicker to associate desirable qualities with their partner in a reaction time task. Nonetheless, they reported diminished feelings of closeness on the explicit measure, reflecting the activation of self-protection goals. In contrast, high self-esteem people primed with approach goals showed greater feelings of connection to their dating partner on both the implicit and explicit measures.

Second, if risk regulation involves a controlled or corrective system, even people who usually prioritize self-protection should pursue connectedness goals when executive control is usurped. For instance, a low self-esteem Sally should look more like a high self-esteem Harry in situations in which Sally’s capacity to correct is compromised. To examine this assumption, my laboratory recently conducted two experiments (Murray et al., 2007, Experiments 5 and 6) in which we manipulated both risk salience (i.e., thinking of a time when a significant other disappointed them vs. thinking of their school commute) and executive strength (i.e., self-depletion vs. not; cognitive busyness vs. not). We then measured participants’ willingness to risk increased interdependence (e.g., willingness to disclose to the partner, let the partner make decisions). When executive strength was usurped, low self-esteem participants behaved like highs. They responded to risk by seeking out risky, interdependent situations that could promote connectedness. However, low self-esteem participants successfully resisted the pressure to increase connection in the face of risk when executive strength was intact.

If the risk regulation system is functional, its operation should also be sensitive to variations in the strength of connectedness and self-protection goals. Specifically, people normally prone to self-protect should become all the more cautious in situations where the pain of rejection is intensified. For instance, a low self-esteem Harry should be even more hesitant to increase interdependence in those situations where he really needs reassurance (i.e., stronger connection goal) and Sally seems disapproving (i.e., more immediate risk). We examined this possibility in a recent experiment (Murray et al., 2007, Experiment 8) in which we manipulated the strength of approach/connectedness goals and the severity of the actual dating partner’s criticism. We then measured people’s willingness to increase interdependence by seeking and providing support. When the desire to approach or seek connection was primed, a partner’s criticisms stung all the more, motivating low self-esteem people to actively distance themselves from care-giving situations that highlight the need to be interdependent.
As the experience of slights and hurts at the hands of a romantic partner is inevitable, the challenge in maintaining a satisfying relationship rests in preventing such situated threats from thwarting connectedness goals. However, for people who feel less positively regarded, the slightest offense is likely to be seen as a sign of impending rejection, motivating them to self-protect and distance themselves from the sting of any further perceived slights. Such efforts to minimize risk would be appropriate if people who feel less valued actually possessed a partner who valued and loved them less, and treated them less well. This does not appear to be the case. Intimates who felt less valued in the diary study still perceived rejection in their partner’s behavior, and reacted defensively to feeling hurt even when the nature of the partner’s behavior and actual regard for them was held constant (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003).

Ironically, the desire to protect against hurt seems to lead people who are trying to find acceptance to undermine the resource of an admiring partner they need to preserve (see Chapter 8 in this volume for a related discussion of the ironic effects of self-protection). For instance, women who chronically anticipate rejection behave more negatively toward their dating partner during conflicts and elicit more rejecting behavior in that specific instance (Downey et al., 1998). Moreover, on days after rejection sensitive women feel acutely rejected by their dating partner, their partner reported greater dissatisfaction (Downey et al., 1998). In the diary study reported by Murray, Bellavia, et al. (2003), the partners of people who felt less positively regarded (correctly) believed they were the target of more hurtful and rejecting behaviors on days after lows had felt most vulnerable. Even though they were not annoyed or upset initially, the partners of lows were also more likely to see them as being selfish and unappreciative on days after lows had felt most hurt and vulnerable.

By putting self-protection at a greater premium than connection, people who feel less positively regarded may create long-term interpersonal realities that defeat their hopes and confirm their fears. Supporting this analysis, a longitudinal daily diary study of married couples suggests that the chronic activation of self-protective appraisal, signaling, and behavioral response rules has a corrosive effect on relationships over time (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). In this sample, relationship difficulties were more likely to arise when the “if–then” contingencies underlying people’s cognition, affect, and behavior mirrored the “if–then” contingencies evident among people who feel less valued by their partner.

First, satisfaction declined when people’s on-line systems for appraising rejection threats were calibrated in a more self-protective fashion. In particular, when women linked their own personal self-doubts to their husband’s lessened acceptance, their husband reported relatively greater declines in satisfaction over time (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003; Murray et al., 2006). Second, satisfaction declined when people’s signaling systems were more sensitive to rejection. When people
reacted to anxieties about rejection by reporting diminished self-esteem the next day, their partner reported significantly greater declines in satisfaction. Third, when women’s behavioral response to feeling rejected was to self-protect and behave negatively, their husband’s satisfaction declined over the year (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003).

**CONCLUSION**

On the brighter side, close romantic relationships offer a unique opportunity for the fulfillment of connectedness goals. On the darker side, the prospect of rejection and relationship loss threatens a profound hurt (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Given such stakes, people only allow themselves to risk seeking connectedness when they trust in their partner’s ongoing positive regard and acceptance. People who find this sense of assurance typically feel safe to prioritize connectedness goals. However, people who struggle to find this sense of assurance self-protect—thinking and behaving in ways that provide a sense of safety in the short term but that can often alienate the partner and elicit rejection.

**REFERENCES**


Loving others is a double-edged sword. The ties that bind us to another person can lead us to experience the very peaks of pleasure or the very pits of pain. And this pain is never more evident than when we are estranged from our loved ones during the act of ostracism (i.e., when we are excluded and ignored). Ostracism within an intimate relationship may take many forms. Some forms may be subtle or potentially
ambiguous (e.g., when our loved one does not acknowledge our greeting when we come home or when they avoid eye contact during a meal), whereas other forms are explicit and leave no doubt that we are the object of their displeasure (e.g., when our loved ones ignore what we are saying, leave the room when we enter, or shun our embrace). Personal experience tells us that irrespective of the form that ostracism may take, exclusion and rejection by a loved one is ultimately emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally depleting, particularly when it continues over days, weeks, or even years. The impact of being ostracized by a stranger is strong and painful and has been shown to lead to aversive psychological responses (i.e., a threat to four primary human needs—belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence; see Williams, 2001; see also Chapter 10 in this volume for a distinction between interpersonal and group-based belonging) and to a range of detrimental behavioral responses such as social susceptibility (e.g., Maner et al., 2007; Carter-Sowell and Williams, 2007), inappropriate mate choice (e.g., Winten et al., 2006), risk-taking behavior (e.g, Dale et al., 2006), and antisocial behavior (e.g., Warburton, Williams, and Cairns, 2006).

Despite the prevalence of ostracism in interpersonal relationships, ostracism research to date has not systematically investigated relational ostracism (i.e., the silent treatment, or ostracism carried out by one partner on another). Instead, ethological and anthropological researchers have focused on documenting the widespread use of ostracism across species (e.g., Gruter and Masters, 1986), age-groups (e.g., Barner-Barry, 1986), and cultures (e.g., Mahdi, 1986). Moreover, in the laboratory, social psychological researchers have largely focused on examining the effects of ostracism by strangers using multiple methods such as ball-tossing games conducted both face to face (Williams and Sommer, 1997) and over the Internet (e.g., Williams, Cheung, and Choi, 2000), role-play paradigms (Zadro, Williams, and Richardson, 2005), Internet chat rooms (Williams et al., 2002), and text messaging (Smith and Williams, 2004).

Our focus in the present chapter is on the intensely personal and powerful effects of ostracism by loved ones. We review our work in two distinctly different paradigms. First, we review a rich and qualitative data set emanating from interviews with individuals who have suffered the silent treatment—a form of relational ostracism—from their spouses or family members. Second, we review recent work examining laboratory-induced ostracism, via Cyberball (a triadic Internet ball-tossing game; see Williams, Cheung, and Choi, 2000), among couples that are participating with a stranger. In this research, one member of the couple is perceived to ostracize his or her partner in favor of allying with the stranger. Here, the simple effects of ostracism that are evident even among strangers are coupled with thoughts of betrayal.

**RELATIONAL OSTRACISM IN THE REAL WORLD—INTERVIEWS WITH TARGETS AND SOURCES OF LONG-TERM OSTRACISM**

To understand relational ostracism in all its complexity and contradictions, it is important to delve into the phenomenological experience of being a target or
source of ostracism. Zadro, Richardson, and Williams (2003) sent out a recruitment advertisement in local papers and magazines asking for targets and sources of long-term ostracism in the general community to discuss their experiences with the silent treatment. More than 200 people responded with e-mails, letters, and faxes, affirming their exposure to ostracism. Most of the targets interviewed stated that they were ostracized by a single source. In the majority of interviews, targets stated that they were ignored by their partner or spouse (60% of cases). Of this sample, 40 were interviewed using a structured interview protocol that systematically examined their ostracism experiences so that the responses of targets and sources could be compared, and assumptions of Williams’s (1997, 2001) model of ostracism (Figure 18.1) on the long-term effects of ostracism could be tested. The
present chapter focuses on the findings that pertain to ostracism between couples and families rather than workmates, acquaintances, or strangers.

**Duration of the Ostracism Episode**

Although all targets had been ignored and rejected by loved ones, the phenomenological experience of being ostracized differed according to the duration of their ostracism experience—that is, whether ostracism was prolonged or episodic. For prolonged targets, one single episode of ostracism from a loved one may have stretched anywhere from a couple of months to several years. The personal experiences described by interviewees left no doubt as to the devastating effects that prolonged ostracism may have on an individual, particularly for those where the ostracism episode had stretched to the point where the possibility of regaining contact with a loved one was minimal and where silence held the threat of being infinite. One such prolonged target stated the following:

> My father has given me the silent treatment whenever he’s been upset with me ever since I was 12 years old. Now I’m 40 years old, and my father hasn’t talked to me for the last 6 months. Recently, he was in hospital, and I was told he might die. I decided I had to go see him, even if he wasn’t talking to me. I walked up to him and held his hand and said, “Oh Daddy, please don’t leave me.” He looked at me, his eyes were welled up with tears, then turned his head away from me. He still wouldn’t talk to me …. His death would be the final silence.

In contrast to prolonged targets who receive a single, unremitting period of ostracism, episodic targets are repeatedly exposed to multiple instances of ostracism from the source throughout the duration of their relationship. For episodic targets, ostracism is a predictable consequence of any actual or perceived misdemeanor on their part. For instance, one target had been ostracized by her husband for periods of up to three months throughout their 15 years of marriage. During the periods of silence, her husband went to extreme lengths to act as though she did not exist, as can be seen from the following incident:

> I have a heart condition, which required surgery at one point, and during one of these times when he wasn’t speaking to me, I actually had the ambulance at my house for the first time ever, with the man giving me oxygen, and [my husband] walks through the house and ignored the fact that it was happening.

Episodic targets often reported a sense of “déjà vu” as they recognized signs that the ostracism process was about to begin again. One target who was episodically ignored by her husband stated that she had become quite proficient at predicting when she was about to be ostracized: “Sometimes I can see the warning signs starting. He will sometimes purposefully almost misinterpret something I’m saying … and then I panic and try and head that off as quick as I can.”
Ostracism versus Other Forms of Interpersonal Conflict

The interviews suggest that acts of ostracism by loved ones are rarely enacted in isolation from other forms of interpersonal conflict. For many of the participants, ostracism was typically preceded by an argument or some form of altercation. The knowledge that any argument may lead to potentially months of silence often made targets fearful of objecting to the source’s behavior or trying to assert themselves in any way in the relationship. Hence, they became virtual prisoners to the whims of their loved ones.

Many targets were quick to compare ostracism to verbal and physical abuse. The majority of targets stated that the silent treatment surpasses other weapons of conflict in terms of its deleterious effects. For example, one female target who received the silent treatment (which she referred to as “mental cruelty”) from her third husband for 10 years stated, “My second husband, who was an alcoholic, used to physically abuse me, but the bruises and scars healed very quickly and I believe that mental cruelty [the silent treatment] is far more damaging than a black eye.” Another target who was repeatedly ostracized by her mother throughout childhood confessed that she had often asked for a beating “rather than endure another period of silence and the shocking atmosphere it created” (see Chapter 16 in this volume for a comprehensive discussion of intimate partner violence).

Although such a confession—that a person would rather be beaten than ignored—seems preposterous, it is understandable when viewed in context. An episode of physical abuse lasts for a finite period of time and often leaves visible evidence of the attack (e.g., bruises, wounds), which can be shown to others in order to receive assistance. The silent treatment, however, may last indefinitely, and the trauma it causes lies beneath the skin, unobservable to the public. Many targets stated that even when they tried to get assistance they were often not taken particularly seriously. One target who had been episodically ostracized by his wife for weeks at a time was ridiculed by his workmates when he told them about the silences: “They said, ‘I wish my wife would ignore me for a month.’ They thought it was all a joke. They don’t know the pain of [being ignored].”

The findings of the interviews—that ostracism is perceived to be more aversive than verbal abuse—mirror those of the laboratory. In a series of studies Zadro, Williams, and Richardson (2005) demonstrated that being ostracized during a five-minute role-play train ride led targets to report a greater threat to the four primary needs than being verbally abused. Although being involved in an argument is not a pleasant experience, targets are still being acknowledged (albeit negatively) by the sources. Moreover, if the target is particularly eloquent or persuasive, he or she may have the opportunity to appease the sources or to at least have them acknowledge the target’s argument. However, when ostracized, the target receives no acknowledgment (positive or negative) from sources, nor is he or she given the opportunity to explain his or her actions or to remedy the situation. The target is essentially forced to wait, powerless, until the source decides if and when to resume contact.
Relational Ostracism and Williams’s (1997/2001) Model of Ostracism

The rich, descriptive accounts of ostracism gathered in the interviews provided support for Williams’s (1997, 2001) model of ostracism (Figure 18.1). There are four taxonomic dimensions presented in Williams’s model: visibility (social, physical, cyber); motive (punitive, oblivious, defensive, role-prescribed, and not ostracism); quantity (low to high); and causal clarity (low to high).

In terms of visibility, the majority of incidents described in the letters and interviews were of social ostracism (i.e., when the source ignores the target in their presence). Social ostracism took several forms, from refusing to look or speak to the target to not setting a place for them at the dinner table. There also were several incidents of physical ostracism (i.e., ignoring the target by physically leaving their presence). For instance, one source chose to completely sever all ties and communication with his wife and two children by living on the second story of the marital home while his family lived downstairs.

Often, physical or social ostracism was supplemented by instances of cyber-ostracism (e.g., being ignored over non-face-to-face media, such as the phone, letters, or the Internet). One target, who was engaged in a purely cyber relationship, was repeatedly ostracized by her cyber boyfriend while in chat rooms. Whenever her boyfriend was angry with her or upset by something she had just written, he would first start to type shorter responses to her questions (i.e., “k” instead of “ok”), then only reply every third or fourth line, until finally he would ignore her completely.

The motive for ostracism varied from interview to interview. In the majority of interviews, ostracism was attributed to punitive motives (i.e., to punish the target for some actual or perceived wrongdoing). For instance, one source stated, “I give the silent treatment basically as a punishment for when I feel I’m in the right or I’ve been hard done by.” Sources also used oblivious forms of ostracism (i.e., where the source acts as if the target is unworthy of their attention and ignores them accordingly). For instance, one source explained that when he ostracises a target, “[The target] does not exist anymore. They could be a statue … but nothing to me. That person has no existence.” Participants also discussed instances of defensive ostracism. Some used defensive ostracism in a protective manner (i.e., to avoid unwelcome attention or dangerous individuals). Others used defensive ostracism to prevent an argument from developing or to prevent the escalation of an argument. For instance, some participants stated that they would refuse to answer the insults of their spouse in order to avoid conflict. Although we think the lack of responsiveness is painful, it is possible that refusing retaliatory insults has a beneficial or effect on the relationship if the refusal is made explicitly and with a constructive tone. (See Rusbult et al., 1991, on “accommodation”; see also Chapter 8 in this volume for further discussion on the potential drawbacks of defensive or “self-protection” motivations in relationships.)

According to the Williams model, ostracism also differs in the level of causal clarity. For the majority of targets interviewed, causal clarity was low—that is, they could not ascertain why they were being ignored or perceived that they were
being ignored for no reason whatsoever. For instance, one target stated, “I’d think ... 'what I have I done now?'... I’d sit in my room thinking, thinking, thinking, and I’d be racking my brain and didn’t have a clue what was going on.”

In contrast to the targets’ perception of low causal clarity, all sources stated that the causal clarity of their ostracism episodes was very high. Sources stated that they always had a reason for ostracizing the target and were often bewildered when targets asked why they were being ignored, particularly if ostracism had been preceded by an argument. One source stated, “I think that if they do something that bad and they don’t know what they’ve done wrong they are really stupid.”

Although the interviews provided substantial evidence for the taxonomic dimensions described in the model, they also revealed another potential dimension of the taxonomy—the style of ostracism used by the source. That is, it became apparent from the interviews that sources differed in the way they showed targets that they were being ostracized. The style of ostracism could be divided into two broad categories—noisy silence and quiet silence.

Although noisy silence seems like an oxymoron, it refers to situations where the source strives, by all possible means, to show the target that he or she is being ignored. Sources engaging in noisy silence tend to indulge in flamboyant gestures of ostracism (e.g., slamming doors in the target’s presence, stomping about, or theatrically leaving a room when the target enters) and to use a veritable arsenal of nonverbal behaviors to accompany such noisy episodes of silence (e.g., glaring, nose in the air, stiff jaw, or turning away). For instance, one source stated that as soon as a target offends her in some manner, she begins a performance to rival “a Vegas drag show”:

They [the target] will usually ask me again and again [what they did wrong], and after about the third or fourth time, I will turn to them and say, “I’m not talking to you” then turn away, usually with my nose in the air. If they are in the kitchen with me while I am getting dinner ready, I will start banging the pots and pans together.... If they enter the room, I will usually turn around and storm out, slamming the door behind me. Once, the door didn’t crash behind me, so I had to bang it open and shut repeatedly till I was satisfied that [the target] knew I was angry.

It is obvious from this account that noisy silence takes an enormous amount of energy and a high degree of theatrical skill to constantly remind the target (in so many novel ways) that they are being ignored. Hence, noisy silence tends to be a short-term tactic, probably because of the incredible amount of energy that the source must expend to keep it going. Typically, noisy silence is quite benign. The source is still communicating with the target (albeit while he or she is stomping past). By interacting with the target, the source is demonstrating to the target that he or she is still an important part of the source’s life—otherwise why else would the source be putting on such a show to punish the target? Surely, if the source no longer cared about the target, he or she could conserve energy and simply ignore the target’s very existence. Tactics such as these that are designed to convince the target that he or she is not worthy of existence are the hallmarks of quiet silence.
Quiet silence is what typically comes to mind when the silent treatment is mentioned. Quiet silence occurs when the source ceases to acknowledge the target’s presence and thus stops, or greatly reduces, all verbal and nonverbal interaction with the target (i.e., ignoring questions, refusing to touch or look at the target). From the interviews with targets and sources, quiet silence can be broadly divided into four categories: (1) holding back; (2) tuning out; (3) shutting down; and (4) cutting off.

One of the most common types of quiet silence occurs when the source is holding back. In such instances, the source is usually incredibly angry at something the target has said or done. Rather than let his or her anger out, the source remains silent, bottling the rage inside. Sources may also hold back when they literally feel too angry to speak. One target admitted to using this tactic on her new boyfriend when he arrived two hours late for a date:

I was so angry with him that I froze. I literally felt frozen. I could feel all that anger just rushing around inside of me, but I could not let it out. I couldn’t look at him in the eye—I kept looking at the wall directly behind him or down at my shoes. I couldn’t say anything—I was worried that if I said anything, all my anger would come rushing out and I would turn into this she-beast and rip his appendages off.

Another form of quiet silence is tuning out. This refers to instances when the source chooses to focus on another thought or activity while the target is speaking, effectively “tuning out” the sound and sight of the target in order to concentrate on something else. Tuning out seems to be a tactic primarily favored by men. One target complained that her boyfriend often tuned out when they spoke on the phone so that he could perform another activity (usually watching television).

Although some sources tend to completely tune out their target, there are others who selectively tune out items of information that they do not want to deal with (e.g., issues relating to responsibilities around the house, or issues that may lead to further conflict). Although tuning out is usually a short-term tactic and is not as malicious as many of the other forms of quiet ostracism, it nevertheless causes the target distress as he or she is repeatedly made to feel as though he or she is low on the source’s list of priorities.

One of the most interesting forms of quiet silence is shutting down. It differs from many forms of ostracism because the source is not trying to punish the target. Rather, it occurs because the source is experiencing some form of extreme emotional stress (e.g., pressure at work, financial stress) and lacks the resources to adequately deal with it. Thus, as a defensive mechanism, the source’s body and mind simply shuts down—he or she grows quiet, unresponsive, and inactive. Often, sources who are shutting down say that they need time alone, and, if they cannot physically leave the situation, they mentally leave the situation by choosing to be silent with their own thoughts. Unfortunately, this action also leads them to shut out their loved ones. One target was repeatedly ostracized by her husband for periods lasting from a few days to a few weeks. She was particularly distraught as these periods would come and go without warning—and seemingly irrespective
of what she would do or say. After years of this behavior, she made a discovery: “I finally realized that my husband was not angry with me during these times. He just needed time alone in his head to sort himself out. When I realized that it wasn’t my fault, things changed [for the better].”

The final form of quiet silence, and potentially the most destructive, is cutting off. It occurs when the source deliberately and completely ignores the target, acting as if the target does not exist. What makes cutting off different from tactics such as holding back or tuning out is that the source is not punishing the target—the source simply wants nothing more to do with the target. As far as the source is concerned, the target just does not exist—and he or she acts accordingly. For instance, one source interviewed typically uses noisy, short-term silent treatment on those she loves. But when it comes to people who truly “disgust” her or who have acted unforgivably, she “…wipe[s] them completely off the face of the earth. That means that I don’t acknowledge them, I don’t speak to them. Ever.”

In the interviews, there were instances of cutting off between relatives that lasted for several years, even decades. According to these sources, such episodes of silence were easy to maintain because they rarely saw the target and had no need to communicate with them—years of ostracism would pass with the source barely noticing. More surprising were the years of cutting off that existed between spouses who still shared the same house. There were several targets interviewed whose husbands had refused to speak to them for periods ranging from one to five years. Although some ostracizing husbands still helped to run the household while giving the silent treatment (e.g., provided financial support, cared for the children), some cut all emotional and financial ties to their family. One target described how she was forced to rely on welfare and the charity of relatives to feed herself and her two children while her husband gave her the silent treatment: “He dressed in all the latest fashions and ate at all the trendy restaurants, while we were dressing in thrift-shop clothing and eating two-minute noodles.” The effects of being cut off are typically psychologically and physiologically devastating, as it suggests to the target that the source holds him or her in such contempt that the source would rather erase the target from his or her life than to acknowledge his or her existence. Future research will aim to delineate why sources adopt these very different styles of exclusion—for example, because of situational constraints, individual differences such as attachment style (see Chapters 4, 5, and 11 in this volume), and approach or avoidance motivations (see Chapter 13 in this volume).

The Psychological and Somatic Costs of Relational Ostracism

Regardless of the duration or style of ostracism, all targets emphasized that being ostracized is an extremely aversive experience. The model predicts that during the ostracism period, the target will experience a threat to his or her four primary needs—belonging, control, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. In accordance with this prediction, the interviewed targets did express feelings indicative of threatened primary needs; however, as these targets had experienced prolonged periods of ostracism or had been repeatedly ignored by multiple sources, the threat to their primary needs had become internalized. That is, targets often
expressed sentiments indicative of low self-worth (e.g., “I’m just no good at anything … failure, failure, failure”), a lack of belonging with others (e.g., “You didn’t belong. You thought, ‘I’m a mistake, I shouldn’t be here, I’m not wanted here.’ That’s what you felt….”), very little control (e.g., “I felt helpless in so many areas of my life …”), and a sense of purposelessness (e.g., “It [the silent treatment] made me question, ‘What’s it all for? Why am I still here?’ whereas before I never questioned that. I knew why I was there and I knew what it was all for.”). As also found in the interviews conducted by Faulkner and Williams (1996), these threatened needs often manifested in self-destructive thoughts and behaviors (“I often think to myself, ‘when is this going to end?’ I’ve thought of suicide”).

Although the interviews provided support for the detrimental effect of ostracism on targets’ primary needs, they also suggested a range of effects or responses that are not described in the model. One particularly noticeable theme was the effect of ostracism on one’s health. During the free recall section of the interview, many targets spontaneously asserted that they experienced a wide variety of somatic effects as a result of ostracism (e.g., “I know that the ostracism with my mother is affecting me because I start to feel really fatigued”; “I started having migraines”; “frequent colds, sore throats, general lack of energy”; “It makes me sick to my stomach that she doesn’t say hello to me”). These health-related effects of ostracism seem primarily to arise from prolonged stress responses (e.g., chronic high blood pressure, heart palpitations), with many indicative of suppressed immune functioning (e.g., constant colds, fatigue, inability to recover from illnesses). The targets also suggested that ostracism exacerbated already existing medical conditions, increasing the severity of symptoms, or inducing attacks or seizures.

The Corrosive Effects of Ostracism on Interpersonal Relationships

It was apparent from the interviews that the effects of ostracism on targets were not only somatic or psychological; many targets also paid a high interpersonal price. Not surprisingly, ostracism tended to have a corrosive effect on their relationship with the source. This was particularly the case for targets who were ostracized by their partner. Many such targets were incredibly bitter that their partner, the one person who was supposed to support and care for them beyond all others, could continually subject them to such psychological and physiological distress. The combined effects of being ignored and (for episodic targets) trying to appease the source to avoid being ignored, typically eroded any positive feelings that the target had toward the source, often to the point where they dissolved their relationship. Several other targets interviewed wanted to leave their partner but could not do so for various reasons, typically because they were financially dependant on their partner, or they had young children and felt that they could not further disrupt the family unit through divorce. Also, in some cases, targets often lacked the self-confidence to leave their abusive partner after many years of ostracism. One such target stated that after years of ostracism from her partner, “I’m not strong. If I was strong, I would’ve left…. I’m so weak that I think I can’t do anything on my own.”

The effects of prolonged or episodic ostracism also tended to reverberate through the target’s interpersonal relationships. This occurred primarily in two
ways. First, in many instances, targets who were ignored by their partner found that ostracism put a strain on their social circle. Few friends would be able to withstand the tense atmosphere of households where ostracism is taking place. One target stated, “We lost a lot of friends or acquaintances … because naturally nobody wants to come into a house where you can cut the air with a knife.” Hence, many friends would stay away, leaving the target with no discernable outside assistance.

Second, not only were targets deprived of existing friendships during the ostracism period; some were also unable to form new bonds. Their experiences with ostracism made many targets, particularly episodic targets, keenly attuned to signs of rejection from others (e.g., “I am overly receptive to any sign of rejection by others and I tend to be a little withdrawn unless I’m very sure of my footing”). Unfortunately, in new friendships and social situations, repartee is rarely free-flowing. For targets of long-term silence, however, the innocent pauses in conversation as a new acquaintance scrambles to think of a new topic of conversation or a witty response are easily misinterpreted—to a target of ostracism, these small silences herald the potential for further rejection. As a result, the target retreats from forming a new acquaintance, even though a new friend would help him or her to regain the primary needs that have been threatened through long-term rejection. For instance, one target stated that when surrounded by people, “I just sort of go into a little shell and I don’t want to talk in case I’m not there…. I feel as if I’m a ghost.”

As a result of years of silence from loved ones, some targets developed a sensitivity to silence such that even pauses in a phone conversation or the stillness that accompanies lying alone in bed at night was enough to induce severe anxiety. One perpetual target who received the silent treatment for four years by her stepfather stated, “I think one of the worst things in life would be to be deaf. I cannot bear silence…. I have to sleep with the radio on at night.”

Sources are often aware of the aversive effects of ostracism on their relationship though many are actually powerless to stop using the silent treatment once they begin. Several sources stated that a potential side effect of ostracizing was losing control over the ostracism process—that is, they are unable to stop giving the silent treatment, even once they decided to reconcile with the target. For instance, one source stated, “Ostracism can be like a whirlpool, or quicksand; if you, the user, don’t extract yourself from it as soon as possible, it is likely to become impossible to terminate regardless of the emergence of any subsequent will to do so.”

There are several possible reasons why sources find themselves in a position where they lose control of the ostracism episode. First, sources may find it difficult to terminate the ostracism episode and forgive the target for fear of “losing face.” In many instances, the initial cause of ostracism is something trivial (e.g., the target has not paid attention to the source, or has forgotten to perform a household chore). The source may feel that the act does not warrant days of silence, yet the source may continue to ostracize the target in order to make the cause of the ostracism seem more legitimate.

Second, it may also be difficult to stop the silent treatment because of the target’s response to ostracism. Targets reported that they would do anything to elicit a response from sources, such as buying presents, performing chores, or literally getting down on their hands and knees to beg forgiveness. Such actions may
be incredibly gratifying to the source, particularly in those instances where the source is punishing the target for not paying sufficient attention to them. In order to maintain this subservient behavior from the target, sources may continue to ignore the target long after they have forgiven them.

Finally, many sources seem to become habituated to ignoring the target. After a few days of monitoring their behavior in front of the target, this pattern of rejection soon replaces previous behavioral patterns as the normal mode of behavior. Just as it was once hard to ignore the target in the initial stages of ostracism, so it becomes hard to acknowledge the target in the later stages of ostracism. The inability to stop the ostracism episode will no doubt have an ongoing effect on the source’s relationship with the target.

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR EXAMINING RELATIONAL OSTRACISM

The research described herein was an initial empirical examination into the dynamics of ostracism in ongoing relationships. The interviews are rich with information and varied in what they suggest about relational ostracism. Together they clearly convey that ostracism occurs among loved ones, and they expand our knowledge of how and when relational ostracism might occur.

Having established that ostracism does indeed occur between loved ones, we are currently doing research that examines the effects of unexpectedly being ostracized by a dating partner versus by a complete stranger. Our primary aim has been to examine how the effects of being ostracized by a relationship partner might compare with the effects of being ostracized by a stranger, and we have pursued this line of research using Cyberball in an experimental setting (Williams, Cheung, and Choi, 2000; Williams and Jarvis, 2006). Cyberball is an on-line computer game in which participants are randomly assigned to being included equally in the ball-toss game or, after a few tosses, are selected never to receive the ball again. The Cyberball research to date has examined ostracism by a stranger. Across studies, the results consistently show that being ostracized by a stranger, versus included in the game, causes a threat to all four primary human needs (e.g., Williams, Cheung, and Choi, 2000; Zadro, Boland, and Richardson, 2006; Zadro, Williams, and Richardson, 2004).

In our current research, dating couple members play a Cyberball game, presumably with each other and with a stranger. In reality, they play in isolation of each other and are randomly assigned to one of four conditions: (1) no ostracism; (2) ostracism by the stranger but not one’s partner; (3) ostracism by one’s partner but not the stranger; and (4) ostracism by both. For example, in the no-ostracism condition, the stranger and partner each direct 50% of their respective throws to the participant, whereas in the partner-ostracism condition, the stranger directs 50% of the throws and the partner only 25% of his or her throws to the participant.

Based on our current research, we hope to learn several things. First, this design allows for a direct comparison of being ostracized in a Cyberball context by
RELATIONAL OSTRACISM

a partner versus a stranger (i.e., a comparison of the two partial ostracism conditions). This comparison will indicate whether the source of ostracism matters or, instead, whether ostracism by anyone equally undermines needs. The comparison also suggests whether there are unique effects to being ostracized by a relationship partner. In short, this comparison may afford inferences about specific circumstances that might influence whether one’s needs are threatened when ostracized, which would expand our understanding of ostracism more generally.

Second, and of equal interest, is the comparison between no ostracism versus ostracism by a partner (but not a stranger) in that the partner ostracism condition suggests how participants react to relationship threats. Compared with a situation in which a partner is being inclusive, a situation in which a partner opts to play with a complete stranger and ignores the participant is likely to be experienced as a threat (and indeed our manipulation check indicates that participants feel much more ignored by the partner in the partner-ostracism condition, relative to the no-ostracism condition).

What is likely to be the reaction to a relationship threat such as ostracism? There is mounting evidence that one’s attachment style—generally, one’s sense of a close and comfortable bond with a partner or absence thereof (see Simpson and Rholes, 1998; see also Chapters 4, 5, and 11 in this volume)—is an individual characteristic that influences reactions to relationship threats in general; insecurely attached individuals have relationships that are more vulnerable to such threats than securely attached individuals (Campbell et al., 2005; Collins and Feeney, 2004; Simpson, Ickes, and Grich, 1999). This research suggests that insecurely attached versus securely attached individuals will differ in their reactions to being ostracized by the partner, possibly more so than in their reactions to being ostracized by a stranger (i.e., attachment might moderate the effect of the ostracism manipulation).

Also, the extent of satisfaction and commitment one feels toward the partner might influence reactions to partner ostracism. Highly satisfied and highly committed individuals have been shown to be less reactive to relationship threats than less satisfied or committed individuals (Arriaga et al., 2007; Johnson and Rusbult, 1989; Murray and Holmes, 1999; Murray, Holmes, and Griffin, 1996). This research suggests that less satisfied or less committed couple members will feel their needs threatened when the partner ostracizes them, more so than when there is no ostracism, but more satisfied or committed couple members should show no such effect (i.e., satisfaction or commitment might moderate the effect of the ostracism manipulation). Alternatively, it is possible that more satisfied or committed partners are more affected by partner ostracism because they perceive that they have more to lose if the partner ignores them. Finally, it is also possible that partner ostracism will be so profound that participants will show consistent reactions irrespective of their level of satisfaction or commitment. In short, the comparison between the no-ostracism and partner-ostracism conditions, and analyses of relationship variables that might moderate the results of this comparison, may afford inferences about reactions to relationship threats, a fundamental relationship process.

Although examining relational ostracism in a laboratory, experimental paradigm is likely to yield novel and meaningful inferences, we do not presume that
being ostracized by a relationship partner while playing Cyberball is comparable to the relational ostracism accounts in everyday life described in previous sections. Yet, the laboratory study will provide a first step in experimentally examining the nature and consequences of relational ostracism. In short, both approaches—assessing accounts of ostracism in everyday life and examining exclusion in a laboratory setting—add important and unique information to our understanding of ostracism.

REFERENCES


On-line dating services encourage their subscribers to maintain their memberships by supplying them with a steady stream of interesting potential partners. If a subscriber records the age, location, and sex of a desired partner, a large dating service (e.g., Yahoo Personals or Match.com) will reply with regular e-mails
containing the pictures and profiles of other subscribers who meet those criteria. The customer thus routinely encounters a flow of presumably available, occasionally alluring, possible partners into his or her inbox. Now imagine that after finding each other in such a manner, two subscribers begin a fledgling relationship that is enticing to both of them. It’s a promising partnership. Their intimacy and investments increase, they become more satisfied and more interdependent, and they reach a point that is an intriguing marker of their emerging commitment to one another: They decide to cancel their subscriptions to the dating service that brought them together.

Or do they? Certainly, having found rewarding new partners, some people would prefer not to be confronted with ongoing exhibitions of tempting alternatives to their newfound mates. Absorbed by their new relationships, they would be less interested in other potential partners, at least temporarily, and their subscriptions to the dating service would no longer seem worth the cost. Other people, however, might be reluctant to cancel the parade of possibilities. With varying degrees of curiosity and attention (and probably without telling their current partners), they would continue to inspect the pictures and profiles of others, being persistently alert to new opportunities.

Clearly, people differ in their attention to alternatives to their present romantic relationships. The interest and eagerness with which people remain alert to, and seek information about, other possible partners varies from person to person at any point in time. Does such variability reflect the operation of stable individual differences that distinguish partners who are capable of lasting devotion and commitment from those who are characteristically more fickle and less reliable? Or, alternatively, is attention to alternatives more dynamic, changing with one’s circumstances and ranging from low to high in most people across different occasions? And most importantly, does it matter? That is, does interest in one’s alternatives influence one’s existing relationships, or is it an innocuous entertainment that has no real effect? Research on attention to alternatives is still in its infancy, and conclusive answers to these questions are still emerging. Nevertheless, the data in hand are provocative and potentially consequential, as we will see in what follows.

THE ORIGINS OF THE IDEA

The proposition that people often pay heed to the outcomes that may be available in alternative relationships was born in Thibaut and Kelley’s (1959) seminal analysis of interdependence in their classic monograph, The Social Psychology of Groups. Alongside the concept of personal comparison levels, the idiosyncratic expectations that determine whether or not we’re satisfied with the relational outcomes we receive, Thibaut and Kelley posited the existence of comparison levels for alternatives (or CLalts), individual estimates of how well we would do if we left our current relationships. CLalts were said to represent the global outcomes, the net profits or losses, people would encounter by departing their present partnerships and embracing the best alternative option that they believed to be available.
to them. Thus, a CLalt involves both the enticing rewards offered by a new partner and the various costs such as “financial and social penalties” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 169) that one would incur by leaving the present partner.

As a result, a CLalt is a complex judgment. On the one hand, both one’s existing relationship and any potential replacement are likely to offer a wide assortment of both appealing rewards and maddening costs. By switching to a new partner, one may gain the attractions of the new partner and avoid the irritations of the old, but one also loses the desirable benefits of the old partner and suffers the nuisances of the new. The other costs of leaving may also be multifaceted. For instance, one’s investments in the existing relationship—the things one would lose by leaving (Rusbult, Arriaga, & Agnew, 2001)—can range from beloved tangible goods, such as a shared copy of The Beatles’s *White Album*, to intangible psychological benefits, such as admiration from one’s mother-in-law (Goodfriend & Agnew, 2004). There is much to consider. Then, on the other hand, one’s calculations of these diverse consequences are likely to be influenced by a variety of emotion-laden and motivational processes. Flushed with romantic excitement, people may blithely shrug off or ignore obvious faults of an (otherwise) tempting alternative (Goodwin et al., 2002) that become painfully plain once one’s passion fades. Even the judgment of whether someone is an available alternative may vary with changeable influences such as one’s momentary self-regard; people with low self-respect probably underestimate their mate value and too often doubt that others will find them desirable (Kiesler & Baral, 1970).

Indeed, because the complex calculations that produce our CLalts are shaped by various motivations, they can be recruited to facilitate the attainment of desired goals. To protect and maintain a desired relationship, for example, committed lovers may underestimate how well they could be doing with other potential partners. They judge very lovely people of the other sex to be much less attractive than do those who are less committed to an ongoing partnership (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989), but they do not differ from their uncommitted peers in their evaluations of older people of the other sex or in their judgments of same-sex peers (Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990). People evidently appreciate gorgeous others who are no threat to their relationships, but they find ways to undervalue those who are realistic—but defensible—threats to their existing loves (Lydon, Fitzsimons, & Naidoo, 2003). By judging their alternatives to be less tempting and desirable than they actually are, people can convince themselves that the grass isn’t really greener on the other side of the fence, thereby reducing their motivation to move next door.

This is where my investigations into people’s attention to their alternatives began. Clearly, CLalts are subjective perceptions that are influenced by motivational processes. What’s more, nuances like these were imagined by Thibaut and Kelley (1959). They allowed that a CLalt was a complex “cognitive construction” (p. 22), and they suggested that its contents would vary with the “salience” (p. 22) of the alternative attractions one encountered. They even implied that to avoid

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* In most cases, CLalts were thought to focus on particular romantic rivals to a current relationship, but Kelley and Thibaut (1978) acknowledged that simple solitude and self-sufficiency—choosing to go it alone for a time—was also a choice that could be explicitly considered.
needless frustration, people might try to distract themselves from attractive alternatives that were not realistically attainable (p. 176). Given this, I wondered why couldn’t people save themselves the small effort involved in derogating alternatives that might threaten a desired partnership by just ignoring those alternatives in the first place? By remaining heedless of rival attractions that might erode their commitment, people would be able to efficiently stay dedicated to those relationships they wished to sustain. Alluring alternatives might lose some of their usual ability to undermine commitment (see Chapter 9 in this volume) if people strategically sought to take no notice of them, and I conceived of inattention to alternatives as a relationship maintenance mechanism that would distinguish those who were highly committed to their romantic relationships from those who were still on the prowl (Miller, Perlman, & Brehm, 2007).

SOME INITIAL DATA

In Miller (1997), I conducted a first study of attention to relationship alternatives. In part, it was a fishing expedition; I expected attentiveness to map onto other interdependency constructs in a coherent and logical manner, but I wasn’t sure what I would find. So I threw a wide net. First, I constructed a simple six-item scale that assessed awareness of, interest in, and distraction by potential alternative partners (Table 19.1). Then, I asked respondents to describe their satisfaction with, investments in, and commitment to their primary romantic relationships. They also rated the quality of their best alternative partner and completed my scale. The items on my “Attentiveness to Alternatives Index” displayed modest but serviceable internal consistency ($\alpha = .69$), and they all loaded on a single factor that accounted for 71% of the variance. They also seemed to work: Attention to alternatives was highly related to the perceived quality of one’s best alternative ($r = .56$) and the ease with which it could be obtained ($r = .61$), and attention also predicted the number of alternatives people thought they possessed ($r = .23$) and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 19.1 The Original “Attentiveness to Alternatives Index” from Miller (1997)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please consider how OFTEN or SELDOM each of the following statements applies to you, using this scale:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I flirt with people of the opposite sex without mentioning my partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I’m interested in having an affair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I go out socially with opposite-sex friends without telling my partner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am distracted by other people that I find attractive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I’m very aware that there are plenty more “fish in the sea.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I rarely notice other good-looking or attractive people. (reverse-scored)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ending to Temptation

2

their number of recent dating relationships ($r = .25$). The more attentive people claimed to be, the easier they thought it would be to replace their current romantic partner and the more compelling they thought the replacement would be. Further, attention to one’s alternatives was negatively related to love ($r = -.59$) and liking ($r = -.39$) for one’s current partner and to satisfaction with ($r = -.58$), investment in ($r = -.52$), and commitment to ($r = -.61$) one’s current relationship. These links were all substantial. The more distractible and interested in others people said they were, the less content and settled they were with their present partners.

Heartened by these patterns, I embarked on a second phase of my procedure in which I sought to obtain behavioral evidence that would support my new scale. Two weeks after completing their surveys, many of the respondents participated in an ostensibly unrelated lab study that was purportedly examining reactions to print advertisements. Participants were asked to inspect vivid slides of underwear models and various products while their skin conductance levels were assessed—and while the milliseconds they spent scrutinizing each slide were unobtrusively counted. The participants’ earlier reports of attention to alternatives were not related to their electrodermal responses, but the time they spent poring over attractive, scantily clad targets of the other (but not the same) sex was. This correlation was not large ($r = .27$), and the observed behavior bore only indirectly on the participants’ interest in real romantic alternatives; nevertheless, the actual actions of attentive people did differ from those of other people who were less interested in the options they possessed.

Finally, at the end of the semester, eight weeks later, I sought to examine the predictive utility of attention to alternatives over time. I identified those participants who were no longer dating the same partner (they comprised 30% of the original sample), and I compared them with those whose relationships had continued. Notably, the data contained several important measures—satisfaction, investments, commitment—all of which meaningfully predict relational success or failure. Remarkably, however, a simultaneous discriminant analysis that employed all of these measures demonstrated that the Attention to Alternatives Index was the best predictor of relationship continuation or failure over two months’ time. And to my surprise, in a subsequent stepwise analysis, attentiveness was the only unique predictor of relationship outcome, correctly classifying 70% of the cases. Apparently, when a person’s flirtatious interest in novel partners was accounted for, classic, proven measures of relationship functioning could provide no further information regarding the chance that the person’s existing relationship would be intact some weeks later. Attentiveness obviously mattered. What was going on here?

GOAL-DIRECTED ATTENTIVENESS

Clearly, we notice only some of the stimuli we encounter, and we are more likely to notice those to which we attend (Mack, 2003). This isn’t news:

Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and present form, of one out of what seems several simultaneously
Possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration of consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others. (James, 1890, p. 403)

When our attention is focused on particular stimuli, the accuracy and speed with which we identify and evaluate them is increased. Behavioral responses are potentiated, and, on occasion, we savor the stimuli more thoroughly (LaBerge, 1995). But our attentional capacity is limited: Paying attention to one stimulus reduces the amount of awareness, consideration, and interest we can allocate to other events (Pashler, 1992).

Classic models of attention hold that it is determined both by the properties of the external stimulus, so that some events are more attention-getting than others, and by the wishes, intentions, motivations, and needs of the perceiver, so that observers with different desires notice disparate portions of a larger whole (Pashler, Johnston, & Ruthruff, 2001). Indeed, both of these influences are important; our attention can be captured against our will by novel, prominent, and compelling stimuli that we have no wish to consider (Most et al., 2005). However, a variety of recent evidence converges on the conclusion that our motivations and interests direct our allocation of attention to a greater extent than stimulus properties do. Our awareness is more easily captured by stimuli that match the things we are looking for, and our goals can clearly shape what we (think we) see (Most et al., 2005; Pashler et al., 2001).

On occasion, we may recognize the preoccupations and motives that shape our attention. Certainly, people may be able to acknowledge their anxieties and fears, and negative affective states like these routinely regulate our foci of attention. People with health anxiety are chronically alert for potential threats to their health (Lees, Mogg, & Bradley, 2005), and those with an excessive fear of failure are quick to detect stimuli denoting disappointment and delay (Duley et al., 2005). More importantly for our purposes here, broader social motives direct our perceptions of our interactions as well. Lonely people pay particular attention to the expressive nonverbal behavior they encounter in others (Gardner et al., 2005), and those who fear social rejection are especially sensitive to signs of disapproval from others (Strachman & Gable, 2006). Clearly, our interpersonal goals direct the interactive events to which we attend (see Chapters 8 and 13 in this volume).

But motivational influences on attention may also be more subtle. Our expectations can shape our preconscious attention to stimuli that are presented so rapidly that we do not consciously know what they are (or even that they exist). When women who were attuned to sexism in others were exposed to sexist subliminal cues (e.g., ho, bitch, whore), they reacted more quickly to them than other women did despite having no conscious awareness that the cues had ever been present (Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2006). Alert for signs of prejudice in others, the women were evidently screening their surroundings for signals of sexism without knowing that they were doing so. This appears to be a case of automatic vigilance in which one’s motives create selective biases in attention that are not necessarily intended or voluntary—and of which one may be unaware (e.g., Hunt, Keogh, & French, 2006).
Analogous results have been obtained by Maner, Gailliot, and DeWall (2007), who demonstrated that people found it harder to disengage their attention from images of gorgeous women than from pictures of average women, with this difference emerging in only half a second’s exposure to the images. This bias was especially evident in men with an unrestricted sociosexual orientation—those who were interested in casual sex (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991)—further suggesting that social motives guide the (almost) instantaneous operation of attention.

Indeed, motivational states related to survival and reproduction may be among the most potent influences on our attention (Neuberg et al., 2005; see also Chapter 17 in this volume). Eye-tracking methodologies find that sexually unrestricted men and women are particularly attentive to attractive, as opposed to unattractive, members of the other sex (Maner et al., 2003), and they find it especially difficult to look away from images of lovely other-sex targets when they are sexually aroused (Maner, Gailliot, Rouby, & Miller, 2007). There is no doubt that “the motivation to seek mates plays a role in guiding attention toward attractive opposite-sex people” (Neuberg et al., 2005, p. 143). Then, once a mate is found, love for that person may motivate suppression of further attention to alternatives that might threaten the new partnership (see Chapter 3 in this volume).

ATTENTION TO ALTERNATIVES AS GOAL FULFILLMENT

Thus, the interest and eagerness with which people monitor potential alternatives to their present relationships plausibly covaries with the strength of interpersonal motives involving mating and intimacy. And importantly, such motivations are not constant from person to person or place to place: Variations in motivation may arise from either individual differences or situational influences. I consider each in turn in the following sections.

Situational Influences

I initially conceived of attention to alternatives as a dynamic process that covaried with romantic contentment, and this it does seem to do. Two studies (Miller, 2002; Simeon & Miller, 2005) have since replicated the substantial inverse relationships between attentiveness and satisfaction, investments, and commitment, and these are patterns that allow the possibility that people become more attentive to their alternatives when they become dissatisfied with their current lot. This may be the case, but high attentiveness to others probably erodes one’s satisfaction, too. Jennifer Simeon and I assessed participants’ attention to alternatives, satisfaction, and commitment

* Indeed, I thought that I detected such a causal pathway after Thibaut and Kelley (1959) got me thinking but before I collected any actual data: “During periods of blissful contentment, I was curiously heedless of the (remote) romantic possibilities presented by new potential partners, whereas, when I was disgruntled, alternative prospects (and fantasies) were more cognitively available. I thought that I was more alert and attentive to other potential attractions when I was less satisfied with what I had” (Miller, 2003, p. 285).
on two occasions three months apart; we found that lower initial satisfaction did predict higher subsequent attentiveness that but higher attentiveness predicted lower satisfaction down the road as well (Figure 19.1). Attention to alternatives has very similar links to investments and commitment over time, so the data suggest that attentiveness is promoted by poor relational outcomes—but in turn, it undermines those outcomes and contributes to further erosion of the relationship.

That conclusion was supported by dyadic data I obtained from both members of heterosexual dating couples (Miller, 2002). Both men and women were less satisfied with their relationships when their partners were attentive to alternatives, and each was more attentive when his or her partner was, too.

Thus, our attentiveness to our alternatives probably increases when we encounter unfavorable outcomes and begin to wish to do better. Still, changes in our circumstances undoubtably influence some of us more than others, and attentiveness does not entirely depend on the situations we inhabit. Consider the link between attention to others and the perceived quality of those alternatives: The positive correlation is consistent with the possibility that sensational stimuli compel our attention. After all, it is hard not to be distracted by others who are captivating and alluring. Moreover, as interdependency theory predicts (Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994) and as Chapter 9 in this volume suggests, people are less committed to their current partners when their alternatives are tempting (Figure 19.2). However, attention to one’s alternatives partially mediates the influence of the quality of those alternatives on one’s later commitment, as Figure 19.2 shows (Simeon & Miller, 2005). The extent to which alluring alternatives undermine our subsequent commitment depends in part on the attention we pay them. Evidently, enchanting new potential partners cannot lure us to their side if we ignore them. Are some people really able to take no notice of such attractions when they exist?

**Dispositional Influences**

Stable individual differences in chronic levels of attention to one’s alternatives do seem to exist. Two types of data support such a conclusion. First, attentiveness

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**Figure 19.1** $(n = 167)$. Cross-lag panel for attention to alternatives and relationship satisfaction over three months’ time. All six correlations are statistically significant, $p < .01$. 

![Figure 19.1](image-url)
itself is reasonably steady over time. The 12-week rest–retest reliability of my Attentiveness to Alternatives Index is $r = .68$, as Figure 19.1 shows (Simeon and Miller, 2005). That level of stability is consistent with a dynamic process that changes with one’s circumstances but that nevertheless is consistently more active in some people than in others.

Second, attentiveness maps onto several stable dispositions in a manner that suggests that it, too, is fairly constant. Attentiveness does not appear to have anything to do with extraversion, neuroticism, or openness to experience, but it shares some variance with agreeableness, and it is quite clearly negatively related to conscientiousness (Table 19.2). The more dependable and reliable people are, the less heed they pay to romantic temptations that might endanger their current relationships. Attentiveness is also positively related to narcissism, and persistently higher attention to alternatives seems to be an important reason why narcissists are routinely less committed to their relationship partners than other people are (Foster, Shrira, & Campbell, 2006): Attentiveness completely mediates the link between narcissism and commitment, which disappears when attention to alternatives is taken into account (Campbell & Foster, 2002). Their grandiose sense of entitlement evidently leads narcissists to be constantly on the lookout for something (even) better, and that is one reason that they remain less devoted to the partners they already have.

![Figure 19.2](chart.png)

**Figure 19.2** Attention to one’s alternatives partially mediates the influence of the quality of those alternatives on later commitment (by Sobel’s test, $z = –7.58, p < .001$). The values in the pathways are proportions of variance accounted for.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Characteristic</th>
<th>$r$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness $^a$</td>
<td>–.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness $^a$</td>
<td>–.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narcissism $^b$</td>
<td>.27–.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of Intimacy $^c$</td>
<td>.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety over Abandonment $^c$</td>
<td>.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociosexual Orientation $^a$</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Superscript letters denote the sources of the tabled data: $^a$Simeon & Miller (2005); $^b$Campbell & Foster (2002); $^c$Miller (2002). Campbell and Foster (2002) reported two correlations from two different samples.
Attachment styles can change with experience, but they are also moderately stable over the years (Fraley, 2002), and attentiveness is positively correlated with one of the two major dimensions of attachment: avoidance of intimacy (Table 19.2). Avoidant people are discomfited by dependency on others, and they are routinely less committed to their partners than are those who are more comfortable in close, interdependent relationships (Chapter 4 in this volume)—and once again, higher attentiveness may be involved. In my study of dating couples (Miller, 2002), attention to alternatives was a partial mediator of the link ($r^2 = .21$) between avoidance and commitment, which dropped substantially (to $r^2 = .06$) once attentiveness was accounted for (by Sobel’s test, $z[67] = 3.88, p < .01$). The disquiet that characterizes avoidant attachment may well encourage a restless watchfulness so that avoidant people are chronically more attentive to other possibilities than are those who are more comfortable with closeness. In any case, it seems that, compared with avoidant people, those who are relaxed and at ease with intimacy are less interested in monitoring the quality of their potential alternative partners, and they feel more committed to their existing partners as a result.

Finally, attention to one’s alternatives goes hand in hand with an interest in casual sex. Compared with those who attach more value to monogamy, people with an unrestricted sociosexual orientation have a greater number of lifetime sex partners (Ostovich & Sabini, 2004), and, fittingly, they report more attention to their alternatives (Table 19.2). Longitudinal data are needed to address this question, but it is likely that unrestricted people remain chronically on the prowl, characteristically monitoring their CLs with more interest and attention than restricted people do. Indeed, the greater attentiveness in those with unrestricted sociosexuality may be a particularly good example of the manner in which dispositional influences can underlie the interpersonal motives that guide attention to alternatives. Some of us (being more conscientious, secure, and monogamous) may have little wish to open the door to temptation, whereas others of us (being less diligent and more vain) may keep shopping for better deals. There may even be

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**TABLE 19.3 The New Attention to Alternatives Scale**

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<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. I go out socially with opposite-sex friends without telling my partner.</td>
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<td>2. I am distracted by other people that I find attractive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I’m always on the prowl for an exciting new relationship.</td>
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<td>4. I take notice when an attractive person walks into the room.</td>
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<td>5. I’m always aware that there are a lot of other partners who are available to me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Good-looking people always catch my attention.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I’d like to be asked to dinner by someone new.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I always notice when a hot person walks by.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I often have lunch or coffee with someone else without telling my current partner.</td>
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a physiological foundation for such motives: When they enter romantic relationships, the testosterone levels of restricted men drop as they settle down, but the levels of unrestricted men, along with their attention to alternatives, stay high (McIntyre et al., 2006). The amount of attention we give to alternative attractions probably depends on both the allure of the attraction and on our individual tastes, but some of us may have chronic difficulty in overlooking and ignoring temptation. And over time, our roving eyes may have several corrosive effects that erode our existing relationships.

DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF ATTENTIVENESS

Attending to one’s relationship may be beneficial (see Chapter 7 in this volume), but attention to one’s alternatives is not. It puts existing relationships at risk, and it may do so by damaging the outcomes encountered by both the vigilant partner and his or her mate. First, it’s undoubtedly obnoxious to recognize that one’s partner remains alert for other attractions. If the attention is explicit—with one’s partner, for instance, refusing to cancel the subscription to the dating service—the lack of commitment is plain, and perceived relational devaluation, suspicious jealousy, and a variety of other hurtful consequences may result. If the attention is less obtrusive, its effects may be more subtle but still important. Covert attention to one’s alternatives may not directly insult one’s partner, but I suspect that it has diffuse effects like those caused by casual cohabitation (Poponoe & Whitehead, 2002). When attentiveness to others is routine, a partnership is less satisfying and the partners rehearse a relative lack of commitment (Miller, 2002). They may encounter more costs such as infidelity (Barta & Kiene, 2005), and one’s partner may gradually become more attentive, too (Miller, 2002). And because they are less devoted to their current partners, people who are attentive to their alternatives will work less hard to resolve conflicts in an advantageous manner; higher CLalts encourage exit, rather than voice, when dissatisfaction looms (Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982).

Moreover, attentiveness to others may carry concealed costs for those who practice it. Simply becoming aware that compelling alternatives exist may engender upward comparisons that foster discontent with one’s present circumstances. Moreover, lasting contentment may continually elude those whose habitual attentiveness to others leads them to replace their current partners: Novelty undoubtedly plays a role in making one’s alternatives seem interesting (Silvia, 2005) and appealing (Dewsbury, 1981), but the passion created by novelty is inevitably eroded by time and familiarity (Vols & Baumeister, 2004). Disenchantment and disillusionment may follow. And remarkably, those of us who are able to choose among several desirable alternatives may not be in an enviable position. An overabundance of choice can be surprisingly burdensome, inflating expectations and increasing the chances for disappointment and regret (Schwartz & Ward, 2004). In particular, people who seek to maximize their satisfaction by continually shopping for the best possible mate are likely to end up disgruntled and discontent. A study of college graduates seeking their first jobs demonstrated that those who insisted on exhausting all possibilities to find the “best” job (as opposed to seeking one that
was “good enough”) did obtain higher starting salaries—but they were less happy and settled in the jobs they chose (Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). We may not be well served by allowing our interpersonal ambitions to run amok.

ATTENTIVENESS AND SELF-CONTROL

We have seen that some of us are chronically more attentive to our alternatives than others are, but anyone’s attention can be “hijacked” and drawn to especially compelling stimuli against one’s will (Miltner et al., 2004). Thus, attentiveness is influenced by both personal and situational influences that may be beyond our conscious control. Nevertheless, a final important aspect of attentiveness is that we are also able to manage our attention to a greater or lesser extent, and we are capable of regulating our attention to alternatives. The intentional control of attention is, like some other motivated processes in close relationships (see Chapters 16 and 17 in this volume), a form of self-regulation (Rueda, Posner, & Rothbart, 2004). It is a key component of the “willpower” that allows us to surmount obstacles and to resist temptations that would otherwise keep us from our desired goals (Mischel & Ayduk, 2002). People differ in their abilities to voluntarily focus, restrain, and regulate their attention (Derryberry, 2002; Luszczynska et al., 2004), but almost all of us are able to exert some attentional self-restraint if we have our wits about us.

That is, however, a big “if.” The self-control of attention, like other forms of self-regulation, consumes a limited psychological resource (Vohs & Ciarrocco, 2004). Prolonged periods of attentional control lead to depletion of our executive abilities, leaving us temporarily less able to persist at effortful tasks, to inhibit inappropriate behavior, and generally to engage in self-restraint (Baumeister et al., 2006). People who have recently been controlling themselves may ultimately become sexually impulsive (Gailliot & Baumeister, 2007), and they may find it difficult to look away from alluring alternatives even when they know that their leering is perilous. After a self-control manipulation in the lab, for instance, people involved in romantic relationships were particularly likely (compared with those who were not dating anyone) to linger longer than usual over photos of swimsuit models of the other sex (Rawn & Vohs, 2006); others who had not exerted prior self-control spent less time poring over the attractive potential alternatives.

Thus, when misplaced attention to alternatives would be maladroit, most of us are probably able to ignore tempting alternatives, at least for a time. The trick may be in regulating adverse attention over an extended period, and three strategies may be profitable. First, self-regulation appears to improve with practice (Baumeister et al., 2006), so recurring efforts to distract oneself from dangerous temptations may gradually increase one’s abilities to do so successfully. Practice is unlikely to make perfect, but it may enhance one’s endurance. Second, avoiding situations and states (e.g., intoxication) that will predictably reduce one’s self-control may avert unwanted lapses. Note, however, that these first two strategies both involve inhibition and self-restraint; thus, it may be more efficacious in the long run for habitually attentive people to pursue a third tactic of shaping their motives so that fidelity and relational commitment become goals of greater value. If inattention
to alternatives is a desired end instead of a form of self-denial, it will obviously be
easier to attain. Can education and insight regarding the risks of chronic attention
to alternatives help in this regard? We do not know, but further study may illum-
nate the extent to which attention to alternatives can be managed and changed.

A NEW ATTENTION TO ALTERNATIVES SCALE

To promote further work on attention to alternatives, I am developing a new scale
with which to assess attentiveness. The original Attentiveness to Alternatives Index
was an exploratory measure. It performed surprisingly well, but it suffered, in my
view, from poor internal reliability and an item (e.g., “I’m interested in having an
affair”) that overlapped unrestricted sociosexuality and low commitment to too
great an extent. Conceptually, I also thought that the index glossed over nuances
in attention that could be important. Specifically, being distractible when alluring
alternatives present themselves seems to me to be less intentional than is active
prowling for novel partners; both instill awareness that alternatives may be avail-
able, but the former is more passive and (perhaps) innocuous, whereas the latter is
planful, deliberate, and more destructive. The motivations directing each type of
behavior are probably related, but distinct.

Thus, my research team* and I wrote 55 new items addressing various aspects
of attentiveness (e.g., “There’s no harm in looking”; “If my relationship were to end,
I know who my next partner would be”) and set out to create a new scale. It is still
under construction, but the present version of the new Attention to Alternatives
Scale (Table 19.3) contains nine items with satisfactory internal consistency (α = .88)
that load on two factors explaining 71% of the variance in the items (Miller et al.,
2007). The factors are correlated (r = .44), but they appear to delineate two distinct
facets of attention to alternatives that involve both active searching for desirable
alternatives (e.g., “I’m always on the prowl for an exciting new relationship”) and
more passive alertness (e.g., “Good-looking people always catch my attention”). Both
facets are negatively related to satisfaction with, and commitment to, current rela-
tionships, and both are positively related to unrestricted sociosexuality. However,
active searching is more highly related to each of these measures than passive alert-
ness is; this suggests that attention to alternatives may in fact have discrete forms—
ranging from distractibility to prowling—whose effects may influence relationships
in meaningfully different ways. Future investigations will tell.

CONCLUSION

The pursuit of successful, satisfying intimacy is a central human endeavor,
and attention to alternatives serves that end in promoting the identification of
potential mates and in encouraging us to approach them. Such attention can be

* Many thanks to a fine crew: Karen Bone, Kimberly Bye, Katherine Castillo, Chelsea Janke,
and Stefanie Urban.
disadvantageous, however, in undermining and endangering existing relationships. Alertness that is functional before one is paired with a partner may erode relational well-being if it continues unabated once a courtship is done. Is it possible for us to balance our desires to find desirable partners with our interest in keeping them once they are won? Clearly, people do sometimes “transcend hedonic self-interest and potential self-gratification to sustain their relationship” (Lydon, Fitzsimons, and Naidoo, 2003, p. 359). Further investigation into the processes underlying attention to alternatives may provide illuminating indications of how and why this is done.

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Contributors to this volume are all leading researchers in relationship science, and they seek here to explore and integrate the subtle influence that evolutionary, socio-cultural, and intra-psychic (cognitive, affective, and motivational) variables play in relationship processes. In addition to discussing the latest advances in areas of relationship research, they also advocate an expanded theoretical approach that incorporates many of the insights gained from evolutionary psychology, social cognition, and research on affect and motivation.

The contributions should be highly relevant to researchers, teachers, students, laypersons, and to everyone who is interested in the subtleties of human relationships. The book is also highly recommended to clinical, health, and relationship professionals who deal with relationship issues in their daily work.