

## *Love Conceptualized as Mutual Communal Responsiveness*

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The term *love* is used in many ways. It has been used to refer to sexual feelings for another person, motivation to be with a person, and selfless devotion to another (just to name a few). Many times it refers to a combination of these things. Very often the term is used without definition. No one usage is the right one. Each has value. Yet in conducting research and in writing about love for academic purposes, it is important to make one's own conceptual definition clear.

**Love conceptualized as (usually) mutual, communal, responsiveness.** Here we define love as having a strong communal relationship with another person (see Clark & Mills, 2012). This refers to partners assuming special responsibility for one another's welfare (over and above the responsibility most humans assume for most strangers). Each relationship member manifests love defined in this way by striving to understand, accept, and care for the other *and* ~~in~~ expecting and seeking the same from the other in accord with the special level of responsibility that has been assumed. Such responsiveness should be present to the best of each person's ability and ~~it~~ occurs in a noncontingent way; that is, acts of responsiveness ~~are~~ not conditional on receiving a repayment nor ~~is~~ the motivation to be responsiveness to make a repayment (Clark & Mills, 2012; Reis & Clark, 2014).

Love, defined in this way, captures love that characterizes close friendships, family relationships, and romantic relationships alike. The term "love," used in this way, represents a sense of each person "being there" for the other in good times and bad, that is, of each being both a safe haven for the other and each also being a supportive secure base (as adult attachment theorists' use those terms; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013). It includes feeling protective of one's partner as well as feeling dependent upon one's partner.

This type of love, occasionally, is one sided. For instance, when an infant is born, almost all parents immediately assume responsibility for that

infant's welfare – indeed, they do so even before the infant is born. They strive to understand, accept, and care for the infant whereas the infant has no ability to reciprocate. When parents behave communally toward their infants, they feel authentic and experience enhanced emotional well-being themselves (Le & Impett, 2015) – feelings that are intimately tied up with feelings of love and, indeed, constitute much of those feelings. This fits our definition of love. The infant experiences love as well as a function of being the target of her parents' efforts to understand, accept, and care for her and those experiences too fit our definition. However, the love we discuss most often is characterized by *mutual* responsiveness of each member of a pair of friends, family relationship or romantic couple. Interestingly, there is evidence that *being* responsive may be even more important for one's own feelings of love than receiving responsiveness (Reis, Maniaci, & Rogge, 2017). However, it is important to point out that when both members of a relationship have the ability to be responsive, both enacting responsiveness *and* seeking/accepting it (in accord with those abilities) must occur for optimal feelings of bonding and love to emerge (see Le, Impett, Lemay, Muise, & Tskhay, 2018). One-sided caring or seeking of care when both members have the capacity to enact love can be just plain odd and disconcerting, undermining overall feelings of love in the relationship.

**Levels of love.** It is important to note that loving, responsive, relationships vary in communal strength (Mills et al., 2004). Communal strength refers to the extent to which people assume responsibility for a partner's welfare and expect the same from that partner. Most people have multiple communal relationships – with romantic partners, with family members, and with friends. The degree of responsibility the members assume for their partners (and vice versa) varies within that set of relationships. Such variation is reflected in the amount of time, effort, and money each member expends to enact responsiveness for one another. For instance, many people have both spouses and friends, and among those who have both types of relationship, many assume more responsibility for a spouse and expect more responsibility from a spouse than they do for their friends. Of course, not everybody orders the communal strength of relationships with spouses, friends, children, and parents in the same way. Such ordering varies both between people and between cultures (Monin, Clark, & Lemay, 2008; Pataki, Fathelbab, Clark, & Malinowski, 2013).

**Agreeing on levels of love.** Members of a given relationship generally implicitly agree on the communal strength of their relationships and will,

as a result, use these levels as guides for giving and seeking responsiveness in their relationship. They also typically understand much about the strength of other communal relationships. This means people will understand if, say, a friend is not responsive to them by, say, attending their birthday party because that friend has a higher level of communal strength in another relationship in which a similar need exists at the same time, because, say, the person is attending his own child's birthday party.

The fact that implicitly agreed-upon levels of communal strength vary means that it is entirely possible to be *too* responsive to a partner, making that partner uncomfortable and interfering with processes that would normally lead to feeling loved. Imagine, for example, the unlikely scenario of having your friend buy you a fancy car and give it to you "no strings attached." You would likely feel very uncomfortable and feel as if the gesture was "too much." As a result, feelings of love might actually drop. The bottom line is that feelings of love are most likely to flourish when members of relationships assume and enact a certain level of responsibility for one another and also act in accord to a mutually and generally implicitly agreed upon level of communal strength. People simply cannot have very strong communal relationships with too many others at one time because we have limited ability to enact high levels of responsiveness. Instead, most people have relationships of different levels of communal strength, with just a very few very strong ones. Consequently, although they feel love as defined here in many relationships, they also feel different levels of love.

In this chapter we discuss interpersonal processes that comprise and facilitate communal responsiveness and, consequently, felt love. We also discuss processes that detract from communal responsiveness and, hence, from felt love. In talking about communal responsiveness, we build upon a long-standing program of research on communal relationships (see Clark & Mills, 1979, 1993, 2012; Mills & Clark, 1982) as well as upon discussions of the nature of responsiveness (Reis & Clark, 2014; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004).

### What Is Communal Responsiveness?

We have said communal responsiveness entails understanding, accepting, and caring for another person but we have yet to provide concrete examples of its enactment. Consider each of the following examples.

A young child bursts into tears. A classmate has teased him about his haircut. His mother hugs him, and then listens carefully to what he is

saying. She provides assurances and says she thinks his hair looks just fine, but also takes care not to dismiss his concerns – she truly wants to understand and to validate his experience. She asks what *he* thinks and he says he does not like his haircut. She assures him she believes him and accepts his view. “If *you* want a new haircut, let’s go get you one.” Her focus is squarely on understanding, accepting, and caring for her child’s needs. She comforts and cheers him up in the moment. She further suggests that, perhaps if the teaser felt good about himself, he would not be so mean – thus also preparing her child for future resilience as well as compassion toward others. The result? Her son feels loved; she feels loving.

Now picture a young woman talking with her older brother. She trusts her brother and feels comfortable being vulnerable with him. She says she is both losing interest in and is stressed by her current high-pressure sales job. She wants to return to school, to get her master’s degree in biology, and to teach high school biology. Her brother is surprised. *He*, personally, would love to have her current high-paying, powerful, and prestigious position. Yet he maintains a focus on *her*. He asks her questions about her current unhappiness as well as about her ambitions. He strives to understand her current concerns and to communicate that he not only understands but also accepts those concerns, saying, “I get it. I didn’t realize how much pressure you were under – wanting to switch paths makes sense now.” He points out other perspectives, but ultimately supports his sister in moving toward and growing in the direction *she* desires, helping her become whom she wishes to become (see Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009).

Next, consider a woman who, in the midst of a meeting, realizes that she has missed a lunch date with a friend. She feels awful, leaves the meeting, and calls to apologize and to express her guilt and embarrassment. Her friend feels hurt because she expected *her friend* to care about her needs, but *she* does not feel anger or a desire to retaliate both because she cares about *her partner* and because she values *the* relationship (Lemay, Overall, & Clark, 2012). *Her negligent friend*, expresses guilt and embarrassment and doing so mitigates the hurt feelings (see Feinberg, Willer, & Keltner, 2012; Semin & Manstead, 1982). This shifts *her* focus from her hurt feelings toward *her friend’s* negative feelings and needs (see Clark, Graham, Williams, & Lemay, 2008). *She* reassures *her friend* that she understands how busy and stressed the woman has been, adding that she, herself, has made such mistakes in the past, intentionally providing a comforting social comparison. The transgressor feels gratitude for her friend’s understanding and expresses it. Her friend appreciates the gratitude (see Algoe,

Haidt, & Gable, 2008). Both members of the relationship end their interaction feeling understood, accepted, and supported.

Finally, consider two good friends who have gone out to dinner together at a shared, favorite restaurant. Neither has pressing needs nor worries. Both truly are comfortable and relaxed with one another. Neither closely monitors what is said nor worries about acceptance by the other. They can focus outward on their shared experience of the new dishes they try (see Clark et al., 2008). They share a number of these dishes with one another and are able to savor each and to enjoy the fact that the other shares their pleasure. Each person's experience is enhanced because it is shared (see Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014; Boothby, Smith, Clark, & Bargh, 2017; Reis, O'Keefe, & Lane, 2017).

Each of these relationships involves communal responsiveness and the positive fallout of that responsiveness. What these situations have in common is that each person feels a special responsibility for the other. Each feels comfortable, understood, accepted, and cared for by the other. They can let down their guards, be vulnerable, give and accept support as needed and desired. They easily focus outward on joint activities when neither requires support. They can do so without protecting themselves – without worrying about whether they are saying the right thing or acting the right way. Their comfort allows them to savor the activities themselves and they also gain pleasure from the fact that their partner is enjoying the activity as well (Boothby & Clark, 2017).

Responsiveness takes different forms in each of these examples. It shows up as seeking to remediate a partner's distress (in the case of the child who was teased), supporting progress toward a partner's desired goals (in the case of the brother and sister), as accommodation and avoiding self-focused, angry reactions (in the case of ~~the woman whose friend forgot their lunch plans~~), and as involving the partner in enjoyable activities (in the case of the friends at dinner). In all cases, partners trust each other and their actions reinforce that trust. Importantly, the partners do *not* exploit one another's vulnerabilities to their own advantage. Moreover, partners are noncontingently responsive – that is, they are not supporting one another because they feel a debt or want to create a debt of the other to them.

All of this this is not the result of communal relationships being completely unselfish (Clark, 2011; Clark & Mills, 1993) and we do not equate love with unselfish altruism (which is another definition of love – but not ours.) People retain concern about the self and expect the other to care. They seek and expect support from the other if and when they need it and when the other has the ability to respond.

They can, and do, however, shift their focus of attention from themselves to their partner when the partner has needs and they do not. Importantly, in our examples, the mother did *not* worry that having an unpopular child would reflect poorly on her. The brother did *not* calculate his own costs in helping his sister explore educational opportunities. The friend did *not* stop talking to the woman who missed their planned lunch date nor did she demand an apology. The responsive partners in all our scenarios likely felt good about themselves for having been responsive and for living up to the norms of a communal relationship (see Williamson & Clark, 1989).

Because partners focus on one another's needs and welfare and are confident that their partner will do the same both members feel safer, more secure, and more loved within mutual, communally responsive relationships. Such responsiveness includes providing benefits to one's partner, both tangible and intangible, that fulfill the partner's needs (e.g. taking a partner to get a new haircut), enhancing the partner's enjoyment of life (e.g. savoring meals and activities together), and supporting a partner's growth toward goals (e.g. researching a partner's career options). Although we have not included an example to illustrate this, communal responsiveness also can be largely symbolic, as when one person writes another a supportive note, sends a card or flowers, or simply expresses affection. When people state that they love another, we think they often mean they are, and intend to be, communally responsive toward the other, and that they have experienced and anticipate continuing to experience the same from the other.

Stating that a loving relationship involves individuals' communal responsiveness places the emphasis on the person who is responsive, and might be taken to imply that all that is needed for a loving relationship is for two people to be willing and able to be responsive to one another. As our opening comments should make clear, though, we place *at least equal* emphasis on the attitudes and self-generated actions of the person who is to be the recipient of responsiveness. Potential recipients of responsiveness must trust that the other will care and act accordingly. In other words, they must be open about their needs, what they enjoy, what their goals are, and even what their transgressions have been (and how they feel about those transgressions). They must be willing to be vulnerable and dependent. This is also illustrated in the scenarios above. The child revealed that he was upset about being teased. The sister revealed her worries and goals. The friend acknowledged her transgression and her feelings of distress and guilt. This opens the door for people *to* understand, validate, and respond communally to their partners – three processes that we already have

emphasized in this chapter and three qualities that Reis and his colleagues (Reis & Clark, 2014; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) have identified as central to establishing intimacy. It is not just about being responsive *for* a partner; one must also be willing to seek and accept gestures of responsiveness *from* a partner. For instance, in one study by Graham and colleagues (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008, Study 2), college students were given the task of watching a peer give a speech and were allowed to, if they wished, help that peer by looking up material on the Internet relevant to the topic of the speech and providing it to the peer. If the peer both showed nonverbal evidence of being nervous and openly acknowledged it verbally – actually stating he or she was nervous – the speech giver peer received significantly more help than he did if he showed no emotion or only nonverbal signs of fear. In another study from the same paper, students who self-reported being willing to express their negative emotions to others before going to college subsequently developed more friendships and more intimate friends during their first semester of college. Expressing vulnerability openly and intentionally invites and encourages partners to be responsive. In the case of this work, just needing the support was not enough. Another example of the importance of willingness to express needs within close communal relationships is provided by the work of Monin and colleagues (Monin, Matire, Schulz & Clark, 2009). In this study of older adults with osteoarthritis and their spousal caregivers, when care recipients were more willing to express vulnerabilities to their spousal caregivers, the caregivers reported feeling less caregiving stress and also having provided more sensitive care to their partners.

### **How Can One Tell If Love, as Exemplified by Communal Responsiveness, Characterizes a Relationship?**

Defining a loving relationship as one characterized by mutual communal responsiveness (to the best of each person's ability) straightforwardly suggests that the best way to measure the presence (or absence) of love is to look for the presence (or absence) of behaviors that index or promote communal responsiveness. That is, if one wishes to understand feelings of love as defined in this chapter then measuring the giving, seeking and acceptance of communally responsive acts is superior to using (especially exclusively using) other, very common methods of assessing relationship quality. These include having a person rate how satisfied they are with a relationship (see Weidmann, Schonbrodt, Ledermann, & Grob, 2017), counting the number of conflicts in a relationship or examining whether a relationship remains stable or not (e.g. Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Using those other indices of “love” – as is very commonly done, especially by people new to relationship research – is not ideal, in our opinion. Considering satisfaction first, interdependence theorists’ construct of comparison levels is relevant. People have expectations for close relationships based on past relationships experienced or observed. If a current relationship exceeds comparison levels, even if those levels are very low, a person may be satisfied. So too can one person in a relationship report high satisfaction and the other low satisfaction, perhaps because only one person’s needs are being met (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Second, consider, the presence of conflict as an index of (poor) relational quality. From our perspective, conflict is not necessarily bad. When conflict consists of constructive complaints about neglected needs and is responded to with attention, possibly guilt or embarrassment, and efforts by each partner to understand, accept, and care in response, conflict can promote communal responsiveness. Indeed, constructive conflict paired with resolution has been shown to be important for problem solving in relationships. Clinical relationship psychologists and developmental psychologists see this as an important part of parenting as well. Children learn to be communally responsive and to solve problems from observing parents do this (McCoy, Cummings, & Davies, 2009) and constructive conflict even seems to have health benefits (El-Sheikh, Kelly, Koss, & Bauer, 2015)

Finally, why is stability not a great index of relationship quality? Relationships may be stable simply because people have poor alternative options (Rhatigan & Axsom, 2006; Rusbult & Martz, 1995) or because members feel they must remain in a relationship because of personal or social prescriptives, such as a personal belief or a strong cultural norm that divorce is unacceptable (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Lehmler & Agnew, 2006), or because of how much they have already invested in the relationship (including children conceived and raised jointly and or years invested in a relationship) (Rhatigan & Axsom, 2006). If we want to understand feelings of love that arise from, co-occur with, and encourage noncontingent responsiveness, then we must look to that noncontingent responsiveness and factors that encourage or interfere with it.

### **What Relationship Processes Characterize High-quality, Loving Relationships?**

Most straightforwardly, repeated, noncontingent acts of being communally responsive to one’s partner, and one’s partner being communally responsive to oneself index high-quality, loving relationships. So too



can the repeated occurrence of mutual efforts to engage in activities that benefit both parties index and contribute to a sense of love, be it within a friendship, a romantic relationship, or a family relationship. The longer the time period over which such responsiveness occurs, the more it is welcomed and successfully enhances partner happiness (see Monin, Poulin, Brown, & Langa, 2017), the longer it is expected to continue (see Lemay, 2016 for a discussion of the importance of expectancies in relationships), and the fewer lapses there are in such behavior, the greater should be members' senses of love.

Of course, as already suggested, there are different types of responsiveness. One type occurs when a person has lost something or has experienced some harm, and aid could be used, as well as when a person provides something desirable to a person (who lacks it, whereas most others in that person's situation have it). This is commonly called helping, and has received considerable research attention (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987; Monin, Poulin, Brown, & Langa, 2017). Another type involves supporting a partner as that partner works toward a goal, short-term or long-term, shared or individual. This type of partner support helps facilitate goal progress and well-being for the goal striver (Feeney, 2004; Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016a). This has come to be referred to in the relationships literature as the Michelangelo phenomenon, wherein a person helps to sculpt a partner into that partner's ideal (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumanshiro, 2009). For instance, a partner may want to make the Olympic trials in the marathon, lose ten pounds, or go on a dream vacation. Supporting a partner's goals, such as ~~one~~ these, may take the form of listening to the person articulate a dream, indicating understanding and acceptance, offering encouragement, stifling an urge to label the goal as crazy or unrealistic, or offering concrete help. Importantly, it may also take the form of cheering for the person as successful steps are made toward the goal and celebrating the person's attainment of the goal, helping them to capitalize on their success (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004).

A third type of responsiveness involves combining forces with another person to create something enjoyable and beneficial to one or both – an enjoyable conversation, a puzzle, tennis game, creating music together, a collaborative project, or a dance (see Reis, O'Keefe, & Lane, 2017). It can also consist of merely engaging in a pleasant activity side by side with a close person, something that has recently been shown to enhance the positivity of pleasant activities (Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014; Boothby, Smith, Clark, & Bargh, 2016, 2017).

A fourth category of positive responsiveness includes caring behaviors in response to a transgression by one's partner. If one's natural reaction in such a situation is to retaliate or express anger, merely restraining oneself from doing so must be counted as responsiveness (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Solvik, & Lipkus, 1991) and it is a process that may become automatic in some relationships (Perunovic & Holmes, 2008). Forgiveness (Van Tongeren, Green, Hook, Davis, Davis, & Ramos, 2015), reassurance of continuing care, and indications of understanding are responsive in this sense (as in the earlier example of a friend forgiving her partner's having missed a lunch appointment.)<sup>1</sup>

A final, important type of responsiveness to another person is symbolic responsiveness. It may occur in the absence of any clear need for support or of any joint participation in an activity. It consists of conveying that one really does care about the partner and will be there if needed. This can be done through words (e.g. saying "I love you"), physical actions like a hug or a touch (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016b), sending cards or flowers, expressions of appreciation and gratitude (Monin, Poulin, Brown, & Langa, 2017), and even, when trust is high, in the form of affectionate teasing. It can be conveyed by merely "being there" for a partner; attending a partner's graduation ceremony, musical performance, or athletic competition, or listening to a partner who is practicing a speech (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016a). The mere presence of and/or touch from a partner can reduce felt threat (Coan, Beckes, & Allen, 2013; Conner, Siegle, McFarland et al., 2012; Eden, Larkin & Abel, 1992; Kamarch, Manuck & Jennings, 1990; Lougheed, Koval & Hollenstein, 2016; Schnall, Harber, Stefannucci & Proffitt, 2008).<sup>2</sup> The mere presence of communal partners can also enhance pleasures (Aron, Norman, Aron & Lewandowski, 2003; Boothby et al., 2014; Reis et al., 2017).

### *Why Responsiveness Is So Important*

Most obviously, responsiveness provides partners with support, goods, information, appraisals, and money that they can use. Less visibly, but

<sup>1</sup> An important caveat: Forgiveness in the face of especially harmful behaviors on a partner's part – particularly behaviors that are not likely to end – can mean that forgiveness, albeit responsive toward one's partner, is unwise (McNulty, 2010a; McNulty & Russell, 2016). Indeed, many seemingly positive, responsive behaviors can be unwise and lead to exploitation if a communal relationship is not truly mutual (McNulty, 2010b).

<sup>2</sup> So too should it be noted that responsibility for a communal partner, especially a child, can increase felt threat (e.g. Eibach, Libby & Gilovich, 2003; Fessler, Holbrook, Pollack & Hahn-Holbrook, 2014). These relationships do have their burdens as well.

probably even more importantly for most people, it provides partners with an ongoing sense of security – a sense of security that allows them to relax, enjoy life, explore, and achieve, knowing that another person is looking out for one's welfare. Knowing that another person is watching out for one's welfare provides respite from protecting the self, permitting a person to focus attention elsewhere, including on a relationship partner and on an enjoyable activity (Boothby et al., 2017; Clark, Graham, Williams, & Lemay, 2008; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, and Nitzberg, 2005). It allows a person to feel comfortable opening up, revealing emotions, stating needs, seeking and accepting help, sharing goals, revealing creations, and engaging the other in joint activities. These are all things that, in turn, elicit further responsiveness. In the absence of evidence that the partner cares, disclosure of goals and attempts to be creative are often closely guarded because a partner who does not care can use this information to exploit or harm a person. Likewise, people are less willing to express emotions in the absence of perceived care (Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017). In the presence of a caring, responsive person, one feels confident of social approval, one can be more authentic, and one feels warmer and less shy (Venaglia & Lemay, 2017).

Unsurprisingly, perceiving that partners care comes, in large part, from partners truly being caring (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay, Clark & Feeney, 2007; Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017). However, people also vary in the degree to which they are prone to trust others generally, presumably as a result of their own past experiences in relationships. Adult attachment theorists have long emphasized this (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2013 for a review of such literature). More recently, Lemay and others have shown with multiple studies that people project their own feelings of trust on relationship partners and that this too is an important source of perceived communal responsiveness (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay Clark, & Feeney, 2007; Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017).

### *The Importance of Responsiveness Being Noncontingent*

For responsiveness to promote a sense of security, as noted above, it is essential that it be noncontingent. In this regard, consider a target's reaction to noncontingent responsiveness. Say, for instance, that a husband states that he will be happy to have his wife's relatives visit, with no further comment, versus agreeing to the same thing *if* she promises to do all the house cleaning for a month. To what will she attribute his willingness to have her family visit? In the first case, she is likely to attribute it to her

spouse's concern for her; in the second case, the thought that it is due to his concern for her will be discounted to the extent that she believes what he really wants is for her to clean the house. Now, consider the same scenario from the husband's perspective. To what will he attribute his *own* actions in each case? Self-perception suggests that he will see himself as caring in the former case, but, perhaps as manipulative or selfish in the second case. The upshot of the former (but *not* the latter) offer should be a wife who feels loved and a husband who feels loving.

Promoting attributions of care and nurturance both on the part of both care recipients and caregivers constitutes one category of reasons why *noncontingent* responsiveness is so important, but there is another, very important, reason as well. It is that the initial impetus for noncontingent responsiveness is, naturally, the recipient's needs and desires. In sharp contrast, the impetus for contingent responsiveness will be the *giver's* desire to receive something in return or ~~as repayment of~~ a perceived debt. As a result, not only may it be the case a partner's needs will be neglected when the donor needs nothing from that person or is not indebted to that person, it may also be the case that a partner will receive undesired or harmful "benefits," simply because a person wishes to eliminate a debt or to create one.

#### *The Importance of Acceptance of Responsiveness Being Noncontingent*

Noncontingent acceptance of support also is an important quality of communal relationships. This refers, simply, to being willing to accept a partner's acts of responsiveness without repaying and without indicating that one feels the necessity to repay (or even wishes they could repay). Gracious acceptance with no protest sends the message that one feels comfortable with the gesture, welcomes it, and desires the relationship. Insisting on repayment or displaying discomfort upon receiving benefits suggests that one might prefer that the communal relationship not exist (or that it be less strong). Noncontingent acceptance of a benefit, however, combined with feeling and expressing gratitude or thanks is acceptable and, in our view, often important. Indeed, research suggests that the mere act of expressing gratitude to a partner increases the expresser's sense of the communal strength of a relationship (Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010) and receiving an expression of gratitude from one's partner appears to increase the recipient's desire for a stronger communal relationship (Williams & Bartlett, 2015). The latter may occur because a person who has been responsive may be somewhat uncertain of whether

the responsiveness was appropriate or desired; the recipient's expression of gratitude eliminates that uncomfortable uncertainty by signaling that, yes, the gesture *was* welcome. Indeed, expressions of gratitude that specifically praise the caregiver's praiseworthiness (e.g. "You were so nice to have done that! I appreciate *you*.")) as opposed to just mentioning the help itself (e.g. "That helped me finish the task") seem especially effective in this regard (Algoe, Kurtz, & Hilaire, 2016). Such expressions of gratitude likely not only make the responsive person happy but also encourage further responsiveness on that person's part toward the expresser (Algoe, Frederickson & Gable, 2013).

### *The Importance of Signaling Needs and Desires and Seeking Responsiveness*

Responsiveness is key to establishing a sense of love in a relationship, and, as already noted, gracious acceptance of responsiveness is also a sign of a well-functioning communal relationship and the presence of love. Yet for a partner to be responsive, that partner must know what to do to enhance the other's welfare. At times it is obvious because the situation is a strong cue. If you're walking down a sidewalk with your friend, he drops a sheaf of papers, the wind is blowing, and he is frantically attempting to gather them, it is pretty clear some help is in order and probably would be welcome. Yet, frequently, partner needs, desires, goals, and fears are not obvious. Thus, for high levels of communal responsiveness to characterize a relationship (and to be felt by its inhabitants), its members must be willing to express their vulnerabilities, needs, goals, desires, and fears freely. This can be accomplished through self-disclosure in the form of verbal statements of needs or, often, through nonverbal expressions of emotion with happiness inviting capitalization efforts, sadness inviting comforting efforts, and so forth. Thus, willingness to self-disclose and to express emotion are signs of love as are active requests for support. Indeed, being as willing to reveal one's authentic self and to seek responsiveness when it is needed as one is to give responsiveness is likely a sign that people are committed to a mutually caring and loving relationship (Beck & Clark, 2010; Clark, Beck & Aragon, 2018).

### **Do More Responsiveness and More Bids for Dependency Always Signal More Love in a Relationship?**

It is important to keep in mind that more responsiveness and more dependency on a person's part is not always better for communal relationships

nor does it always enhance feelings of love. Recall the discussion above regarding people assuming differing levels of responsibility for the welfare of different partners and of partners implicitly agreeing on this. One-sided violations of the implicit agreement by being too responsive (as in giving a friend a new car) or by seeking too much dependence will likely decrease feelings of love in many relationships. Thus, an important part of loving relationships is adhering to the implicitly agreed upon strength of the relationship and mutually desired trajectory of the relationship – be it as one stable in strength or as one growing in strength across time.

### Other Considerations

Returning to the question of what constitutes a loving relationship, it is our sense that the terms *love* and *loving* are used to refer to a communal relationship when that relationship surpasses some implicit threshold of communal strength. We also believe that loving relationships are those in which people share assumptions about the strength of the relationship and consistently enact the expected (or surpass expectation of) responsiveness in that relationship. However, other factors may influence a person's sense that a communal relationship is characterized by love, such as the length of time a particular relationship has been characterized by a high level of communal responsiveness and the length of time a high level of communal responsiveness is expected to continue.

In thinking about what contributes to a sense of love, it is interesting to return to our point that communal relationships need not be symmetrical in strength. As stated earlier, parents typically feel more responsibility for the welfare of their young children than those children feel for the welfare of their parents. However, does this mean that the parents love the children more than the children love the parents? Not necessarily. The reason is straightforward. *Both* feeling a strong communal responsibility for another person *and* perceiving that another person feels a strong communal responsibility for the self contribute to a sense of love (whether the relationship is symmetrical or not). Hence, even when a relationship is characterized by asymmetrical communal strength, it need not be characterized by asymmetry in the amount of love the participants feel for one another (although it may be).

What those thresholds of communal strength must be for the term *love* to be used undoubtedly differs between people and cultures. Just how it differs and what factors weigh in (e.g. how long a history of communal responsiveness one must endure, how long it is expected to continue, and where a relationship sits in a person's hierarchy of communal relationships) is a matter for future research.

### **The Importance of Certainty**

Communal relationships differ not only in strength and in placement within a person's hierarchy of other communal relationships, but also in felt certainty about the communal nature of the relationship (Mills & Clark, 1982). We can be absolutely sure about the level of communal strength of a given relationship, somewhat uncertain, or very uncertain. Many factors drive certainty. An obvious one is the length of time a communal relationship has existed. All else being equal, the longer a communal relationship has existed, the more certainty should exist. Indeed, uncertainty about the nature of relationships is part and parcel of the initiation phase of close relationships (Clark, Beck & Aragon, 2018). A person's history in other communal relationships may well influence their certainty about the strength of a present one. A history of failed communal expectations may well carry over and influence one's certainty about a current relationship. Variability over time in a partner's responsiveness is also a factor, with greater variability creating more uncertainty. Finally, the extent to which a partner has sacrificed their own self-interest to be responsive ought to increase certainty (Holmes and Rempel, 1989). Uncertainty of the communal strength of relationships likely undermines the sense that the relationship is characterized by love.<sup>3</sup>

### **Placement of the Self in One's Communal Hierarchy**

People feel responsible not just for communal partners' needs; they also feel responsible for their own needs. They place themselves in their own hierarchy of communal relationships, mostly at or near the top. Placement of the self in the hierarchy has implications for the sense of love that the self feels for a partner as well as for the sense of love that the partner feels for the self. In particular, if the self is placed far above the partner, then even the strongest communal partner's needs will not take precedence over the needs of the self. Sacrifices will not be made for the partner. Forgiving a partner for transgressions against the self will be rare. The very fact that the self's welfare always takes precedence over that of the partner should serve as an indicator to both parties that the love is not exceptionally strong.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note that others have defined love as involving arousal plus a label (e.g. Dutton and Aron, 1974; Berscheid and Walster, 1974). Uncertainty and variability may be associated with greater anxiety and arousal that may contribute to a sense of love defined in that manner, but probably not to a sense of love as discussed in this chapter.

If the self is placed either at the same level as the partner (as many long-term romantic partners may do) or at a level lower than the partner (as parents may often do with their child), the story is very different. In such cases, sacrifices *will* be made, the needs of the partner *will* sometimes (given equal strength) or even often (if the self is placed below the partner) take precedence over the needs of the self, forgiveness will take place regularly, and so on. The few relationships a person has that fit this category are often considered the *most* loving relationships. The placement of self, relative to a partner, is, we believe, a potent determinant of this.<sup>4</sup> This is why sacrificing self-interest to be responsive to a partner promotes certainty about the communal nature of the relationship (Holmes and Rempel, 1989).

### Numbers of Communal Relationships at Various Levels

Reis et al. (2004; see also Clark & Mills, 2012) suggested that communal relationships are typically arranged in terms of a hierarchy of communal strength and also that, when arranged in such hierarchies, they tend to form triangles with many very low strength communal relationships at the base, fewer in the middle, and a few, very high strength relationships at the top. If one is uniquely high in another person's hierarchy of relationships, one may feel especially loved.

### *What Is Ideal Relative to What Is Real*

The amount of communal responsibility a person wishes or professes to assume for another person and the amount enacted toward that person can differ. Moreover, the amount of communal responsibility a person ideally expects from another person and the amount actually received can differ. In assessing what produces a sense of love, the perception of actual responsiveness received relative to what is expected or desired ~~is~~ important. So too ~~is it that~~ the amount of responsiveness given relative to the giver's sense of what should be given ~~influences how loving that person feels in the moment.~~

<sup>4</sup> An important caveat is that some people are high in a trait known as unmitigated communion (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998). They place the needs of a partner above their own needs, neglect their own needs, and fail to alert a partner to their own needs. This trait may arise from a person having low self-esteem, feeling unworthy of care, and/or having a great desire to win others over and to please them. This is *not* a trait we believe contributes to optimal communal responsiveness nor to mutual feelings of love and it is a trait that has been linked to low psychological well-being (Aube, 2008).



### The Importance of Individual Differences in Expectancies that Others Will Be Communally Responsive

Thus far we have discussed a loving relationship as being one that is objectively characterized by communal responsiveness. Of course, there is variability between individuals in their general, chronic tendencies to be communally responsive (and to behave in such a way as to elicit communal responsiveness). There is also variability between individuals in their tendencies to *perceive* that others are communally responsive to them (given the same objective circumstances).

Many (conceptually overlapping) traits are relevant in this regard (Reis et al., 2004). They include communal orientation (Clark et al., 1987), self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Murray et al., 1998; Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003), rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996), and attachment styles (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1982; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). People who are high in communal orientation, high in self-esteem, low in rejection sensitivity, and securely attached undoubtedly are more likely, on average, to be communally responsive to their partners in any given relationship (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992; Clark et al., 1987), to reveal vulnerabilities, to ask for help from partners (Simpson et al., 1992), and to perceive their partners as communally responsive, especially in ambiguous situations (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Downey & Feldman, 1996). They also are less likely to be threatened by negative information about their partner, and less likely to withdraw from dependency on their partner in the face of any sign of rejection (Murray et al., 2003). Indeed, people who are generally confident in their partners' positive regard even find positives in their partners' faults (Murray & Holmes, 1993, 1999).

### What Promotes Communal Responsiveness?

What encourages communally responsive acts? ~~Are there processes that support communal responsiveness and contribute to an overall sense of loving and being loved?~~ We believe most people have *knowledge* of basic communal norms. That is, if explicitly asked, most people readily would agree that helping, providing support toward goals, including partners in enjoyable activities, willingness to forgive partners (except for extremely negative behaviors), and conveying care through words and symbolic actions promote the formation, maintenance and repair of close relationships. Indeed, most people are quite adept at immediately behaving

communally when they desire a new friendship or romantic relationship (Berg & Clark, 1986; Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark & Waddell, 1985; Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987; Clark et al., 1986; Clark et al., 1989; Williamson & Clark, 1989; and see Clark et al., 2018 for a discussion of the role of strategically presenting oneself as a communally oriented person during relationship initiation).

### *Trust Is Central*

What matters far more to being *able* to form, deepen, and, especially, to maintain communal relationship in the face of challenges, are (a) *trusting* that a particular partner truly cares about one's welfare and, simultaneously, will not exploit or hurt one, as well as (b) *trusting* that a partner desires to be a recipient of one's care and will accept such care, along with a mutual communal relationship. The former type of trust affords one the courage to reveal needs and seek support; the latter type of trust affords one the courage to offer support.

Trust in a particular partner within a specific relationship is what is crucial to a loving relationship. Such trust is primarily built up by having a partner who is truly responsive to one's welfare even in the face of their conflicting self-interests (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Holmes, 2002). Of course, the propensity to trust is the central part of the individual differences that were just discussed as relevant to communal responsiveness. Yet, the trust that inheres in a particular partner within a particular relationship remains important to achieving a sense of love. No matter how generally secure and trusting a person is, that person likely does not experience love until the trust is manifested within a particular relationship.

Trust in a particular partner's felt communal strength toward oneself need not be entirely based in reality for it to promote relationships. There are now numerous studies that have shown that people tend to project their own felt communal strength (or lack thereof) onto partners, seeing those partners as feeling about as much communal strength toward them as they feel toward that partner (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008; Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017). This encourages them to behave communally toward their partner, which, in turn, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy if the partner welcomes the behavior and responds in kind (Lemay & Clark, 2008). Recipients' of responsiveness can have and often do have biased perceptions of the support they actually receive based upon their own desires to come across as more or less responsive (Lemay & Neal, 2014). This, too, almost certainly influences how loved they feel.

### To What Relationship- and Love-enhancing Processes Does Trust Give Rise?

It is our sense that trust that a particular partner truly cares for one gives rise to a host of processes, which promote the formation, maintenance, and strengthening of communal relationships. It is, perhaps, easiest to understand how trust in a partner's care facilitates behaviors that elicit support, such as revealing one's own vulnerabilities; self-disclosing needs, goals and desires; willingness to express emotions (Clark et al., 2004; Clark & Finkel, 2005; Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017); and issuing straightforward requests for help. Trust is necessary to engaging in these behaviors because the other can turn one down (thereby hurting one's feelings and/or embarrassing one) or even exploit one's revealed vulnerabilities. Trust is also crucial to noncontingently accepting benefits from partners, since one is signaling a willingness to be dependent on the other by doing so.

Trust is also integral to the process of noncontingently providing support. People like partners more when those partners do not repay them for benefits received and do not ask for repayment of benefits given (Clark & Mills, 1979). Yet, especially early in relationships when one does care non-contingently, one is doing so with no guarantee that the person will welcome the support and no guarantee that the other will be similarly responsive to the self. Trust, we believe, provides the courage to believe that noncontingent responsiveness will be welcome, and the reassurance that the other will be responsive to the self *if and when* such responsiveness is needed.

It is interesting to note that high trust also appears to give rise to a host of positive cognitive biases that support mutual noncontingently caring relationships and, hence, ought to increase feelings of love in relationships (see Murray & Holmes, 2017 and Lemay & Clark, 2015 for discussions that go beyond what can be covered here). This point has been made clearly by Murray, Holmes, and their colleagues in talking about dependency regulation (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). They suggest that having faith that one's partner regards one positively (and, we would say, more specifically, having trust that the partner is likely to care about one's welfare) allows one to "take a leap of faith" and to hold positive illusions about that partner. The illusions they study consist largely in viewing partners as having traits, such as kindness, which should allow people both to risk revealing vulnerabilities and to believe that their own communal gestures will be accepted. Other processes to which trust may give rise, and that may also foster maintaining or increasing dependence on one's

partner, include making benign attributions for a partner's less than perfect behavior (Fincham, 2001), being accommodating (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), and seeing one's partner as being superior to alternative partners (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). Lemay and colleagues also have provided extensive evidence that people who are highly motivated to form or maintain communal relationships with partners positively bias their perceptions of partners and situations in ways that support those goals (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008; Von Culin, Hirsch, & Clark, 2017, Study 2), meaning people who are especially motivated to communally care for partners project those feelings onto partners, seeing them as equally as communally motivated as they are themselves. This is the case even when controlling for those partners' self-reports of their own communal motivation and, in some cases, controlling for objective observers' sense of the partner's motivation to behave communally. Experiments too support the notion that a person's own communal motivations can bias perceptions of partner communal motivations. Specifically, participants exposed to manipulations designed to alter their felt care for a partner in the moment, change perceptions of partner responsiveness in a congruent way (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008).

People highly motivated to have communal relationships also selectively attend to information that is consistent with that goal and "remember" information from the past in ways biased to reflect positively on the relationship. Lemay & Neal (2013), in a daily diary study, for instance, found that perceivers who are chronically motivated to bond with partners have more positive memories of their partner's responsiveness across days. Also, their daily fluctuations in motivation to bond are positively associated with daily fluctuations in memories of partner responsiveness (while simultaneously controlling for those partners' own reports of their own responsiveness on the relevant days and even controlling for perceivers' initial perceptions of partners' responsiveness of the relevant day). Additional work by Lemay & Melville (2014) found evidence that when a partner has not been particularly responsive, a communally motivated person underestimates the extent to which they self-disclosed their needs and desires to that partner thereby providing an excuse for the partner's low responsiveness and, presumably, allowing them to maintain their own communal motivation.

In sum, it seems that people who are highly motivated to form, maintain or strengthen communal relationships create a world in which perceptions of their partners' desires and behaviors match their own motivation.

Happily, it appears that their motivations and biased perceptions often become self-fulfilling prophecies (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay & Neal, 2013; Lemay et al., 2007). Such biases give people the courage to be responsive to partners and then they respond in kind. We are, in ways we both realize and may not realize, creators of our own loving relationships.

### **How Might a Lack of Trust Detract from Communal Responsiveness?**

We view low trust in others' care as the primary factor that interferes with the development of ongoing communal responsiveness and love in a relationship. Mistrust heightens a person's focus on self-protection, which, in turn, typically (a) moves the self above the partner, sometimes far above the partner, in a person's hierarchy of communal relationships; (b) makes a person very reticent to reveal vulnerabilities; and (c) heightens a person's reluctance to be noncontingently responsive to the other, lest the other reject communal overtures (which would hurt) or not respond to the person's own needs (in mutual communal relationships) when needs arise. The ultimate fallout is independence from others at best, and conflict, suspicion, tendencies to interpret partner behaviors in negative, defensive ways (Collins, 1996; Collins & Allard, 2001), and outright negative interactions at worst.

We have studied two processes that, we believe, arise from a relative lack of trust in others' care and a resultant felt need to protect the self: One is following contingent norms within close relationships – what Clark & Mills (1979, 2012) have called exchange rules. Another is having a tendency to functionally segregate positive and negative information about partners in memory (Graham & Clark, 2006, 2007).

Consider following contingent norms for giving and accepting benefits first. Doing so is certainly “fair” and, indeed, has been advocated as a positive technique for maintaining the quality of relationships (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Yet, as we have already noted, following contingent norms undermines both the giver's sense of being nurturing and the recipient's sense of being the object of care. It also results in responsiveness being dictated as much or more by the provider's needs than by the potential recipient's needs, desires, or goals.

People do prefer noncontingent to contingent rules for giving benefits in close relationships; people who had been led to desire a communal relationship like their partners less when those partners appeared to follow exchange norms by repaying them for benefits received or asking for

repayments for benefits given (Clark & Mills, 1979; Clark & Waddell, 1985), as well as avoid keeping track of benefits when a communal relationship was desired (Clark, 1984; Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989). Other evidence comes from studies of ongoing marriages, which show that although almost all couples start out with the view that communal norms are ideal for their relationships (Clark et al., 2010; Grote & Clark, 1998) and make efforts to be communally responsive, stressful times can cause members to begin calculating fairness, which, in turn, increases conflict (see Clark, Lemay, Graham, Pataki, & Finkel, 2010; Grote & Clark, 2001 for avoidant persons) and appears to be associated with both low trust and decreased marital satisfaction (Clark et al., 2010).

Yet another process to which low faith in others appears to give rise is thinking of partners as “all positive” or “all negative” at a single point in time (Graham & Clark, 2006, 2007). Graham and Clark reasoned that whereas all people feel a need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), those low in trust that others will care for them (as indexed by low self-esteem or anxious attachment) find approaching a less than seemingly perfect other very difficult. Hence, in times of low threat, they tend to defensively see others as perfect, which allows them both to approach and interact with such people and to feel that partners will reflect positively upon them. However, once they detect a fault in others, they quickly conjure up all other faults, which provide an excuse to avoid depending upon the person and to avoid being embarrassed by them. The result, Graham and Clark claim, and for which they provide evidence, is a tendency to think of partners as “all good” or “all bad” at a given point in time – a tendency that does not characterize people high in self-esteem (and trust of others), who appear to view partners in more realistic and stable ways. Our sense is that a tendency to segregate a partner’s positive and negative attributes instead of integrating them will detract from communal responsiveness in a number of ways. First, a balanced sense of a partner’s strength and weaknesses ought to support both being optimally communally responsive to that person *and* optimal seeking of support from that partner. For instance, if one knows that one’s partner has great mathematical skills and also is forgetful, one can both recommend that he or she apply for a desirable job requiring those skills and remind them of the deadline for applications; and if one needs some tutoring in mathematics for a course one is taking, one can both ask for that help and call to remind them of when the help is needed. Beyond this, having a balanced view ought to allow for a steadiness in views of and communal responsiveness toward the partner across time and events (Graham & Clark, 2006; Wortman, 2005)

that should, as noted above, increase trust and felt love. All-positive and all-negative views of partners, in contrast, ought to lead, respectively, to expecting too much from partners and believing they need little support (when views are positive) and avoiding supporting or relying on partners (when views are negative).

Moreover, just as high trust leads to cognitive biases that support communal relationship functioning, low trust often does just the opposite. The work by Lemay and colleagues reviewed additionally demonstrates people do project their own low felt communal strength toward partners onto those partners putting the brakes on their own communal behavior (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008). Moreover, people low in trust of others (e.g. low self-esteem or insecure attachment) show biases to see their partners in a negative light. For instance, Beck & Clark (2010) have found that avoidant people and people who are experimentally induced to feel avoidant in the moment, tend to perceive benefits that they have been given as having been non-voluntarily given (dictated by the situations) rather than given voluntarily as a result of partner's truly caring for them. This likely prevents them from responding communally in return and from feeling loved as a result of having received the benefit.

Finally, some recent work has shown that having a *partner* who is low in trust can even undermine a person's *own* communal behavior. For example, MacGregor and colleagues (MacGregor, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2013; MacGregor & Holmes, 2011) find evidence that people who merely know their partner is low (rather than high) in self-esteem (and therefore likely to be low in trust that others care about them) caused those people to withhold disclosures of their own accomplishments. This in turn prevented their partners' possible responsiveness in the form of capitalization (e.g. celebrating their successes). Further, Lemay and Dudley (2009) have found that people who perceive partners to be insecure begin to express inauthentic positive affect toward them. Whereas this seems to be effective in making their partner feel more valued, their own relationship satisfaction dropped. These studies together suggest that low trust not only undermines a person's own ability to freely self-disclose (a trait that promotes mutual communal responsiveness) but also, when detected by partners, inhibits their partner's authenticity and willingness to disclose.

### Summary and Conclusions

To summarize, we believe that repeated and consistent giving and receipt of communal responsiveness results in experiencing relationships

as loving ones. In mutual communal relationships, such responsiveness is dependent upon each member trusting that the other cares and will accept care. Beyond this, sensing where one is in a partner's hierarchy of other communal relationships and where one places one's partner in one's own hierarchy can have an impact on felt love with higher placements, ~~particularly relative to the partner, thus~~ enhancing felt love. Trust gives rise to a wide variety of interpersonal processes, including actual acts of communal responsiveness (indicating understanding, validation, and noncontingent helping; including the other in joint activities; supporting; signaling felt care) and acts that often directly elicit receipt of ~~felt~~ care (expressing emotion, self-disclosure, asking for support). Less obviously, trust encourages processes – such as viewing one's partner in a very positive light and more positively than alternatives, making benign attributions for partner misdeeds, accommodation, and forgiveness – that permit a person to remain comfortably within the relationship and to continue acting in communally responsive ways.

Low trust, in contrast, discourages communal responsiveness and revealing information about the self that may elicit communal responsiveness from others. Instead, it gives rise to behaviors, some of which, on the surface, may seem acceptable (and even admirable) but which, simultaneously, undermine communal responsiveness. Such behaviors include relying on the self even when receipt of support might be very useful, suppressing emotions, giving and accepting benefits only on a contingent basis, and behaving in a wide variety of defensive ways that may lead to harmful chronic ways of thinking about partners, such as segregating positive and negative thoughts about partners. Behaviors that are chronically associated with high rather than low communal responsiveness will come to elicit high rather than low feelings of love. Low trust ~~may~~ also be detected by partners and lead them to inhibit their own comfortable disclosures of their own feelings and successes thereby inhibiting optimal responsiveness to them.

We do not claim that communal responsiveness and the interpersonal processes with which it is associated are the only ways in which love can be productively defined. However, we do think that the term is often used to refer to a relationship characterized by chronic communal responsiveness and comfort, and the security and warm feelings that accompany it and that this applies to friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationships alike. Communal responsiveness is also, we firmly believe, the most important factor contributing to the now well-documented fact that having close, loving, relationships



is tremendously beneficial to one's mental and physical health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010).

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