

## Close Relationships

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The field of research on close relationships is burgeoning. In the not so distant past it was possible to summarize most social psychological research on friendships, romantic relationships, and marriages in a handbook chapter. This is no longer true. Thus, this chapter addresses some specific and important questions about close relationships without trying to cover all recent relationship research. The questions include: What do people mean when they say they have a “close” relationship with someone? What psychological processes are involved in becoming close to another person, and what processes interfere with attaining closeness? Why do people value close relationships? Finally, what is it about close relationships that may account for the now very large body of literature showing links between having close relationships and having good mental and physical health?

A great deal of research arising from many different laboratories is converging on the idea that answers to these questions center around each member of a relationship being successfully responsive to their partners’ actual needs and desires, as well as on making it easy for their partners to do the same for them. Pulling this off provides each relationship member with a person other than the self willing to watch out for and support them, together with a sense of purpose and generativity as they watch out for their partner. As attachment theorists have taught us, these relationships provide a secure base from which individuals can confidently venture forth, explore the world, and attain success, as well as a safe haven to which to retreat when stressors arise. They also provide us with an important sense of identity.

This chapter starts with a conceptualization of the nature of closeness itself, as well as some commentary about the field itself. It then moves on to discussing factors that draw people into such relationships before discussing in detail a model of responsiveness dynamics within relationships. We conclude with some comments about what remains to be done. Processes that support the health of mutually responsive relationships (as well as some that are inimical to effective mutual responsiveness) are outlined.

The view that responsiveness is key to optimal relationship functioning and, indeed, the sine qua non of close relationships, is strongly advocated. Some may disagree, positing instead, perhaps, that sexuality, commitment, stability or satisfaction, a lack of conflict or some combination of these factors are the key determinants of a high quality close relationship. Certainly, such criteria have often been used as markers of relationship success or well-being by social psychologists, sociologists, and clinicians. Moreover, all these factors *relate* to responsiveness in important ways. Yet, each can be high (or low in the case of conflict) *without* relationship members being responsive to one another, and if that is the case, the relationship would not be considered a high-quality, close relationship from the present perspective.

The view that responsiveness is key to success in relationships has been suggested by others and is central to *many* current theories in the adult close relationship field including attachment theory (e.g., Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Rholes & Simpson, 2004), risk-regulation theory (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), theories of intimacy (Gable & Reis, 2006; Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), communal relationships theory (e.g., Clark & Monin, 2006), efforts to understand people’s drive to “belong” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Cox, 2008), as well as to research on interpersonal rejection (e.g., Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006; Williams, Forgas, & von Hippel, 2005), empathic sharing, accuracy, and care (e.g., Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2009; Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2008), prosocial behavior (e.g., Bierhoff, 2002; Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006), and social support (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, in press). So, too, is the importance of the concept of interpersonal responsiveness central to much work on individual differences such as rejection sensitivity (Ayduk, Zayas, Downey, Cole, Shoda, & Mischel, 2008; Downey & Feldman, 1996; London, Downey, Bonica, & Paltin, 2007) and self-esteem (Leary, 2005). Reis, Clark, and Holmes

(2004) presented a case that the concept of responsiveness is central and essential to understanding relationships, and the same premise underlies this chapter.

## WHAT IS CLOSENESS?

The term “close relationship” is often used and rarely defined. Certainly people have an implicit feel for what a close relationship is and use the term often. When the term is used, no one asks, “Well, what exactly do you mean by closeness?” Instead, when asked to name types of close relationships, people readily point to friendships, romantic relationships, and family relationships. Yet, these are just labels. Moreover, the very same people who point to such relationships as prototypical “close relationships” often will not hesitate to add that they are not close with their own *particular* father or mother or sister.

Only a handful of researchers in the relationships field have offered explicit definitions of the term. Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (2004) were among the first. They equated closeness with the degree of interdependence between two people. The more frequent, diverse, and strong the impacts of each person’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior on the other, and the longer the duration of the relationship, the closer the relationship. This definition proved useful in predicting such things as the degree of distress on relationship breakup (e.g., Simpson, 1987), and a more recent “atlas” of types of interdependence (Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2002) might be utilized as a basis for investigating different forms of this type of closeness.

Other definitions, more akin to lay use of the term “close relationship,” equate closeness with intimacy, which can be viewed as the outcomes of a set of interpersonal processes in which two people understand, validate, and care for one another (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Compatible with this are definitions that equate closeness with the degree of motivation to respond supportively to the other’s welfare. This degree of motivation refers to the extent to which the person is willing to act, non-contingently, in ways that promote the other’s welfare, and is indexed by the costs in time, effort, money, and emotional investments the person is willing to incur to benefit the partner (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004). Still others equate closeness with an incorporation of the other into one’s self-concept (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 2004). Beyond this, some people might equate closeness with commitment to the relationship (intent to remain in the relationship) and with the various outcomes that have been linked to commitment including seeing the partner as a part of the self (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), and willingness to

accommodate, sacrifice, and forgive (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998; Rusbult, Hannon, Stocker, & Finkel, 2005; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Finkel, & Wildschut, 2002; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigotas, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999).

There is, of course, no one correct conceptual definition of closeness. Yet, as this is a chapter on close relationships, it is important to define what closeness *means in this particular chapter*, for that defines the scope of the chapter. Here closeness refers to the degree to which a relationship serves two broad functions for its members: (1) providing both members a sense of security that their welfare has been, is, and will continue to be protected and enhanced by their partner’s responsiveness; and (2) providing both members a sense that they, themselves, have been, are, and will continue to be responsive to their partners (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). These functions are best served, we assert, when both members of a relationship are non-contingently responsive to one another’s welfare and allow themselves to be dependent on their partner’s responsiveness, alerting partners to their needs and comfortably accepting support when it is needed. A quantitative dimension of responsiveness exists as well, for people can vary in terms of how responsive they are to one another in terms of the costs, time, and effort they are willing to devote to monitoring and supporting the other’s welfare, as well as in terms of their willingness to depend on the other for support. The greater the degree of responsiveness felt and enacted by each member, the closer that relationship is.

Whereas in many, perhaps most, close relationships partners are both the providers and recipients of responsiveness, we do not believe a relationship must be mutual and symmetrical for a sense of closeness to exist. Because, at times, one person has greater ability, motivation, or both to provide responsiveness and the other is primarily a recipient of responsiveness (e.g., the prototypical example of this being relationship between a parent and a very young child), a sense of closeness can and often does exist even in relationships that might be described as fairly “one-sided.” In these relationships, one person (e.g., the parent) provides most of the care, whereas the other (e.g., the young child) receives most of the care. For example, a mother may feel very close to her very young child as a result of feeling and enacting tremendous responsiveness toward that child, and the child may share the sense of closeness as a result of being the recipient of that care even though the levels of responsiveness given and received are clearly asymmetrical. Of course, in this example, the asymmetry is natural for the type of relationship in question. If a similar degree of asymmetry in communal responsiveness were to occur within a

relationship normatively expected to be characterized by a symmetry in responsiveness (e.g., a friendship between two able-bodied [physically and mentally] persons), the same feelings of closeness would not exist.

Importantly, closeness, as defined for the purposes of this chapter, may be related to many of the other constructs just discussed. It overlaps conceptually with intimacy, as defined by Reis and colleagues (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988), and with the concept of communal strength, as defined by Mills et al. (2004). It is also greatly facilitated by trust (Holmes, 1991; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Simpson, 2007), because trust allows the fortitude to care for others unconditionally and is crucial for being willing to reveal one's vulnerabilities and allow others to care for the self (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). It is also facilitated in important ways by commitment, as defined by Rusbult and her colleagues (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001), because commitment keeps one in a relationship, allowing one to keep being responsive even in the face of a partner's poor behavior (Rusbult et al., 1998), and facilitates the difficult behaviors of forgiveness (Rusbult et al., 2002, 2005) and sacrifice (Van Lange, Rusbult, Arriaga, Witcher, & Cox, et al., 1997; Whitton et al., 2002). Commitment seems to keep members of close relationships in an implemental frame of mind (cf. Gagne & Lydon, 2001a, 2001b; Gollwitzer, 1999) with regard to the relationship; that is, commitment seems to promote certainty regarding one's decision to maintain a relationship, as well as striving for responsiveness rather than continually strategically presenting oneself as a desirable partner, evaluating the other, and protecting oneself from risking dependence on the other (Clark & Beck, in press). In addition, because adopting a norm of being non-contingently responsive involves provision of support in response to a partner's needs if and when they arise in the future, and because cultivating responsive relationships likely involves sharing information about needs across time, adopting and applying a norm of non-contingent high responsiveness when with a relationship partner almost always requires some degree of intent to persist in the relationship.

Conceptually, closeness as we define it here is distinct from the constructs of the degree of interdependence and inclusion of other in the self. We can, for instance, imagine two highly interdependent enemies who have frequent, diverse, and strong impacts on one another over a long period, but the impacts are largely negative, aimed not at providing mutual support but rather at competing with and possibly harming the partner. Such a relationship is close in terms of interdependence, but not necessarily in terms of mutual responsiveness. (Of course, it is difficult to imagine a highly responsive relationship that is not also highly interdependent, so, empirically, the constructs will overlap). So,

too, is responsiveness a distinct construct from including the other in the self. People may include others in the self-concept without necessarily seeking or providing responsiveness, although, again, it is difficult to imagine that in highly responsive relationships there would not also be a good deal of including the other in the self.

## THE MANY FORMS OF RESPONSIVENESS

Responsiveness takes many forms (Reis et al., 2004). Perhaps the first to come to mind is provision of help to partners when those partners have needs that cannot be met independently. Yet responsiveness takes many other forms as well. It includes endorsing a partner's goals and providing the partner with the time, space, and support necessary to pursue the goal or to explore (Feeney, 2004), spending time with a partner, including him or her in joint activities or groups (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and celebrating a partner's accomplishments (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). It can be largely symbolic as when one simply tells a partner that one likes or loves that partner. It may involve affirming a partner's self-concept (Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009; Swann, 1987). It can take the form of restraining oneself from taking actions, such as not telling a partner a new haircut looks bad or encouraging a partner to engage in activities independent of the self that promote the partner's well-being. Sacrifice, forgiveness, and sometimes even just being quiet while putting up with a partner's grumpy behavior are responsive behaviors as well (Rusbult et al., 2005; Whitton et al., 2002). Responsiveness may, at times, even appear a bit negative on the surface, as when one offers a partner constructive criticism or restrains oneself from helping a partner who ultimately will be better off working through a problem himself or herself as a parent might do when a toddler tries to tie his own shoes. What is key to a responsive action is that it supports and promotes the partner's welfare.

Notably, our definition of closeness is not linked to sexuality. We realize that a considerable body of recent work, much of it based on evolutionary theory, focuses on determinants of sexual interest or mating goals. Moreover, sexual interest is often an important determinant of desires and attempts to establish and maintain a romantic relationship. We do not review that literature here. Instead, we focus on the concept of mutual responsiveness as it is enacted in and serves as a basis not only for close romantic relationships but also for friendships and family relationships. In romantic relationships, a mating goal may motivate people to form a mutually responsive bond with another person, yet

it may remain separate from such bonds. (See the chapter on evolution by Neuberg, Kenrick & Schaller, this volume, for coverage of much of the work on sexual determinants of forming romantic relationships and of behavior in those relationships.)

## FOCUSING ON PROCESS

How are we to understand such closeness and the well-being it confers? A focus on identifying and understanding the multiple and interrelated intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that characterize and promote (and sometimes detract from) relationships being responsive seems essential. We believe high- versus low-quality, close relationships must be defined in terms of these processes if we are to truly understand them, together with understanding just how and why they promote individual well-being. We need to know what actually occurs in these relationships that contributes to people feeling good, enjoying the relationships, and experiencing the positive consequences of these relationships (as well as what may go wrong process-wise, and how negative processes hurt relationships and the individuals who make up the relationship).

In much “close relationship” work, this simply has not been done. Rather, it has been common in both sociology and psychology to measure static markers of some aspect of a relationship (e.g., the individuals within the relationship share or do not share a religion; the individuals in a marriage were very young at the time they married; an individual in the relationship has a particular personality trait) and to correlate such variables with one of a number of possible “markers” that the relationship is either good (e.g., high ratings of relationship satisfaction, the relationship has lasted a long time) or bad (e.g., divorce occurs, members say they are dissatisfied). However, as House, Landis, and Umberson (1988) noted some time ago, we already know the association between having relationships and well-being, but we need to know the mechanisms through which the association is mediated. Moreover, these mechanisms, as Cohen (2004) pointed out, will be varied. Some will buffer people in the face of acute stress. Others will promote positive feelings day to day. Yet others may be harmful and erase the health-promoting qualities of relationships for some individuals and perhaps even harm members’ well-being (Cohen), and their absence should be considered markers of relationship well-being.

We believe that identifying high (low)-quality relationships by intrapersonal and interpersonal processes will provide the clearest picture of just what such relationships are and will provide the best basis for intervention in troubled relationships. Yet, this mapping out of processes that

promote and inhibit noncontingent responsiveness and happiness in relationships is going to be complex. It is not going to simply involve producing a list of “good” processes and “bad” ones because research increasingly makes it evident that whether certain processes are good or bad often depends on relationship context. Consider forgiveness, for example. Forgiveness is often labeled a virtue, and consistent with that view, evidence exists that it promotes relationships (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2004), and among spouses married to partners who rarely behave negatively, being more forgiving in the face of negative partner behavior *is* linked to remaining more satisfied across time (McNulty, 2008). From our perspective, we would say that such forgiveness is responsive to the errant partner; it likely makes the partner feel accepted and cared for even in the face of having flaws. In addition, it should promote feelings of being caring in the forgiver, which also ought to benefit the relationship. Yet, among spouses married to partners whose typical behavior is destructive, being more forgiving has actually been shown to be associated with steeper declines in satisfaction across time (McNulty). In other words, it seems to be terrific to forgive a partner who likely has good overarching intentions and makes minor slipups, as we all do, but bad to forgive a partner who is truly abusive, as forgiveness in such a case does nothing to correct the bad habits and may even reinforce them. In this case, a seemingly responsive behavior may promote or even allow to accelerate nonresponsive behaviors on the part of the forgiven partner. Therefore, seemingly “good” relationship processes may not be “good” in all contexts.

Likewise, seemingly “bad” behaviors may not always be bad. Consider expressing anger to one’s partner. Many studies have shown that people say they do not like others who express anger (cf. Sommers, 1984). Yet Yoo, Clark, Salovey, Lemay, and Monin (2009) have found that expressing anger results in declines in liking for partners when a communal (i.e., mutually responsive) relationship is not desired or when the communal strength of a relationship is weak. However, expressing anger can also convey needs and does not cause declines in liking when a communal relationship is strong (Yoo et al.). Indeed, in such a case expressions of anger actually have been shown to elicit enhanced levels of social support (Graham et al., 2008; Yoo et al.). So, too, has expressing anxiety to a securely attached partner been shown to elicit support, whereas expressing similar levels of anxiety to a partner who characteristically avoids intimacy appears to drive that partner away (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992).

Thus, it should be possible to paint good pictures of what high-quality, responsive, close relationships look like and what poor-quality relationships look like in terms of intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Yet, pictures of what good and bad close relationships look like will not be perfect

mirror images of one another. For just this reason it is also now clear that for purposes of intervention in troubled relationships, it will be insufficient and naïve to point to differences in how troubled versus happy partnerships operate, and simply to tell troubled couples to stop what they are doing and substitute with behaviors that characterize happy relationships. Context matters. A final point to be made in this regard is that we clearly need more work that integrates findings arising from samples of normally functioning dyads (typically done by social psychologists) with findings arising from samples of more troubled dyads (typically done by clinicians).

It also is important to consider the developmental trajectories of close relationships. We currently have bodies of literature on determinants of initial attraction and much on the functioning of established relationships, most typically focusing established romantic relationships among young adults. Yet, we have little data that track actual relationship formation, that is, little data on what happens between initial attraction and the establishment of close, ongoing relationships. We have some, but not much, developmental data on what unfolds over the course of ongoing romantic relationships, particularly in the early years and particularly across the transition to parenthood for married couples, but more is needed. We have little data on the actual unfolding and deterioration of relationships, particularly in the case of friendships. It is important to fill these gaps, for not only is it the case that the processes that characterize these stages may be distinct in nature and degree from those that characterize other stages, but processes that may be normative or beneficial to relationships in one stage may be non-normative or harmful to relationships in another stage. Consider, for instance, being anxious, cautious, and guarded in a relationship. This sort of anxiety may be healthy and adaptive early in relationships (Clark & Beck, in press; Eastwick & Finkel, 2008b) but a sign that all is not well in established relationships. Or consider having positive illusions about one's romantic partner. This appears to be a good sign and to facilitate a partner's positive growth in established relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b, 2003; and see Murray & Derrick, 2005 for context), yet seeing one's partner clearly and without bias may be far more functional when forming a relationship (Gagne & Lydon, 2001a; 2004) lest one miss the potential partner's negative attributes and end up unwisely committed to a partner whose negative attributes subsequently erode satisfaction (Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Markman, 1979, 1981). To illustrate the importance of focusing on the development of interpersonal processes across time, we note the considerable attention received by Gottman's list of four attitudes that predict marital failure (Gottman, 1994): criticism (or attacking a partner's

character), contempt (attacking a partner's sense of self), defensiveness (seeing oneself as a victim and warding off perceived attacks), and stonewalling (or withdrawing from a relationship to avoid conflict). We applaud the focus on interpersonal process. Yet, importantly, noting a relationship is characterized by these four processes, and therefore bad, and predicting its demise is insufficient. Can one simply tell people to stop such behaviors and all will be well? Likely not. Something drove people to engage in these processes in the first place, and changing the "symptom" likely leaves its antecedent causes in place and does not give individuals a clue regarding what healthy processes ought to replace whatever poor relational processes led to the symptoms in the first place. We need to know how and why an initially desired, and perhaps well-functioning, relationship became characterized by criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling, and therapists need to know what intrapersonal and interpersonal processes people need to learn and practice if there is to be any hope of eliminating such bad behaviors.

Fortunately, relationship researchers are rapidly informing us of the nature of many of the processes that likely form the constellation of specific, helpful and harmful, intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that promote (and sometimes detract) from relationship health, and thus individual mental and physical health. Moreover, individuals such as McNulty are keeping us from making the simple and tempting generalizations from our studies of relatively well-functioning dyads to all dyads. There is, unfortunately, still little work on relational trajectories and processes as they unfold across relationship initiation, commitment, maintenance, and deterioration, but there is some and we will mention some examples throughout this chapter.

Unfortunately, we cannot say much about developmental trajectories in this chapter because this is an area in which little extant work exists and much work remains to be done.

## A BROAD, INTEGRATIVE PROCESS MODEL OF RESPONSIVENESS DYNAMICS

As noted earlier, we focus our review on the dynamics of responsiveness within close relationships that involve a system of integrated processes (see Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000), including providing, perceiving, receiving, desiring, seeking, and benefiting from responsiveness within close relationships. Also, as noted earlier, we conceive of the construct of responsiveness broadly following Reis et al. (2004) so that we can highlight similarities across research areas. Hence, constructs and processes emphasized in diverse research areas, such as reactions to evaluative feedback,

social support, attraction, attachment, caregiving, and social inclusion, are often related closely to responsiveness as we conceive it; research on these issues often seems more similar than different to us in terms of their implications for interpersonal responsiveness dynamics. As such, we treat them somewhat interchangeably. Of course, important differences exist across these constructs, but here, in the interest of theoretical parsimony, our goal is to highlight their commonalities.

Although the belief that a partner is motivated to respond supportively to one's needs is a critical component of perceived responsiveness, other forms of responsiveness have been studied and we address these other forms in our review. Another commonly studied form is the specific belief that a potential or existing partner has positive regard for the self. Perceiving that the partner has positive regard for the self may indirectly contribute to the more global belief that a partner will respond supportively to the self. Positive evaluation is widely believed to be a predictor and indicator of approach motivation—people approach objects (including other people) that they view positively. People desire to avoid negatively evaluated others. Hence, those who feel positively regarded may be confident that the partner wishes to approach the relationship to form a close bond characterized by mutual responsiveness. Moreover, people desire to be valuable relationship partners in others' eyes (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and believing that others have positive regard helps fulfill this desire. Beyond feeling valued, however, people seem to desire to be understood by their relationship partners and to receive feedback that verifies importantly held identities (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Swann, 1987). Such feedback may be responsive for many reasons. First, and probably foremost, feeling understood by a partner likely contributes to the belief that the partner is motivated and able to be responsive to the self. After all, a partner who has not made the effort to understand one and who does not know one's unique perspectives, interests, desires, and needs cannot possibly be expected to respond supportively to these things. Indeed, understanding of needs is often included in measures of caregiving (Kunce & Shaver, 1994), and observed support provision has been related to wives' accurate views of their husbands' specific abilities and traits (Neff & Karney, 2005). People also reported greater intimacy in their marriages when their spouse's views of their abilities matched their own views of their abilities, whether positive or negative. In addition, people may desire feedback that confirms existing self-views because they rely on their self-views to navigate their social environments and predict future outcomes (Swann, 1987; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). They seem to rely on romantic partners to help them diffuse self-discrepant feedback (De La Ronde & Swann, 1998; see also Swann & Predmore, 1985). Of course, being positively regarded can

sometimes conflict with being understood, which can produce ambivalent reactions to either form of responsiveness (Shrauger, 1975; Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). One compelling model of how both forms of responsiveness can occur and have benefits distinguishes among levels of abstraction. Most people seem to simultaneously enhance their spouses in regard to rather broad qualities (e.g., global worth) and perceive them rather accurately in regard to specific, circumscribed qualities (e.g., tidy) (Neff & Karney, 2002, 2005). This pattern of responsiveness likely causes partners to feel that they are both valued and understood.

## RESPONSIVENESS AS A RELATIONSHIP-SPECIFIC CONSTRUCT

Consistent with a view of relationships as somewhat autonomously functioning systems (see Reis et al., 2000), we view responsiveness to a partner and perceptions of that responsiveness as largely relationship-specific phenomena. Although this point is not frequently made, we believe it is an important point because it is one that is often overshadowed by the prominence of individual difference work in the close relationships area, which may be taken, by some, to suggest that responsiveness and perceived responsiveness are qualities of individuals rather than of relationships.

Theoretically, responsiveness should be mainly relationship specific for a number of reasons. First, a mundane but powerful reason is that we simply do not have the capacity to have highly responsive relationships with too many people. We have the resources to carefully monitor and respond to the needs of only a limited number of individuals. Moreover, the more highly responsive relationships we do have, the fewer we need. Thus, people tend to have sets of hierarchically ordered responsive relationships that vary in communal strength from low (with, for instance, strangers and casual acquaintances) to moderate (with, for instance, friends) to very strong (perhaps with a child or spouse) (Clark & Monin, 2006; Mills & Clark, 1982; Reis et al., 2004). To whom we are responsive and from whom we expect responsiveness depend on who the partner is, where in our communal hierarchy our relationship with them sits and where, in their hierarchy, their relationship with us sits (see Monin, Clark, & Lemay, 2008). These relationships tend to be mutual. Indeed, as we discuss later, mutually responsive relationships may be created by detecting a partner's responsiveness and then feeling more motivated or able to be responsive in return. The very nature of such hierarchies dictates that responsiveness will vary most by relationship, not by the individual differences in tendencies to be responsive or to elicit responsiveness from others.

Second, just how attributes, skills, and needs mesh to facilitate (or impede) responsiveness is, logically, dependent on the combination of attributes two people bring to a relationship. A good example of this is provided by some recent research on empathic accuracy that demonstrates that empathic accuracy is not dependent just on the perceiver's skills. Instead, for a perceiver to be empathically accurate regarding a partner's emotional states, not only must that person be motivated and skilled enough to detect emotion accurately, but the partner also must be emotionally expressive (Zaki et al., 2008). Other examples include the likelihood that people who share intense interests in wine-tasting or tennis may be the only ones who can appropriately respond to one another's desire to discuss wine or engage in a skilled and high-level tennis game and that those who share sorrows such as a loss of a child may also be best able to be responsive to one another, perhaps in a support group. This is an important reason, we believe, for the powerful effects similarities have on relationship formation and satisfaction. Finally, shared histories, investments, and goals may motivate both partners' responsiveness in relationships, which may create mutually responsive relationships.

Empirical studies support the view that responsiveness is, to a large extent, relationship specific rather than individually based. For instance, although some people generally like others and feel liked by others, substantial relationship-specific variance components are also present; people like and feel liked by different people to different degrees (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Levesque, 1997). More closely related to our theoretical construct, care for others' needs and perceived care by others varies substantially from one relationship to the next (Lemay & Clark, 2008a), as does perceived social support (Barry, Lakey, & Orehek, 2007; Davis, Morris, & Kraus, 1998; Lakey, McCabe, Fisicaro, & Drew, 1996; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991), desires for closeness (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Barry et al., 2007; Cook, 2000; Klohnen, Weller, Luo, & Choe, 2005; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Pierce & Lydon, 2001), fears of abandonment (Baldwin et al.; Barry et al.; Cook; La Guardia et al.; Pierce & Lydon), and felt intimacy (Pierce & Lydon). That is, people seem to differentially feel responsive and differentially perceive responsiveness across their multiple relationship partners.

Interestingly, recent research suggests that people (and cultures) vary in terms of the extent to which relationships are emphasized as aspects of self-concept (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002; Gore & Cross, 2006). Viewing oneself as inconsistent across relationships seems to be more troubling and more detrimental for well-being among those who have independent self-construals than for those who emphasize interdependence

and relationships in their self-concepts. This is intriguing, as it suggests that those who are relationally interdependent are also likely to be the ones whose levels of responsiveness vary most according to the relationship in which they find themselves.

This is not to say that individual differences and features of the external relationship environment (see Berscheid, 1999) are irrelevant. To the contrary, such factors are extremely important for understanding relationship phenomena (as we review later). However, the existence of relationship-specific processes seems to us to be quite normative, and relationship-specific processes may frequently overwhelm other factors once relationships are established (e.g., Barry et al., 2007; Cook, 2000; Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Klohnen et al., 2005; Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). We emphasize the importance of normative relationship-specific variation in responsiveness primarily because this has sometimes been obscured by an emphasis in the literature on the impact of work on individual differences, particularly individual differences in attachment styles. Yet, this point is not at all at odds with attachment theory because that theory itself emphasizes that the natural course of events is for individuals to become especially attached to particular other individuals and not to all others.

We would also note that the very fact that all people seem to have hierarchies of close relationships that vary in responsiveness raises intriguing new questions about these individual differences. Do people who are especially responsive have more "close" relationships altogether than others? If so, where in their hierarchies do these additional responsive relationships sit? Are they at the bottom with people being more responsive to acquaintances? At the top with people being more responsive to spouses? All along the hierarchy? Do people who are especially responsive have stronger communal relationships altogether than others? In other words, to say that some people are more responsive than other people (an individual difference focus) leaves open several possibilities regarding *how* this additional responsiveness is manifested in communal relationship hierarchies.

#### DO PEOPLE WANT RESPONSIVENESS?

To this point we have suggested that good, high quality, close relationships are characterized by responsiveness. This may seem obvious, but it is worth examining whether empirical evidence exists for this assumption. Although global measures of relationship satisfaction and general relationship quality are somewhat ambiguous, they do seem to index the extent to which one's relationship conforms to

one's ideals and expectations (Hassebrauck & Aron, 2001). Hence links between measures of responsiveness and such global measures may be taken as evidence relevant to whether people want responsiveness. The fact that strong correlations are routinely observed between perceived relationship quality and perceptions of partner's care (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007), social support (Abbey, Andrews, & Halman, 1995; Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006; Gable et al., 2004; Kaul & Lakey, 2003; Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2006), love (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001), regard (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006), valuing (La Guardia et al., 2000), and willingness to sacrifice (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999) indicates people do desire responsiveness in their relationships. In addition, the fact that people value communal traits (e.g., empathy, friendliness, helpfulness) (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007) and trustworthiness (Cottrell, Neuberg, & Li, 2007) in relationship partners, and that they value them more than they value agentic traits (see also Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Sprecher, 1998) and more than they say they value such attributes as a partner having resources and beauty (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986) provides further support for the value of responsiveness in relationships. The common belief that responsive self-disclosure and emotional support are critical for the development of closeness (Fehr, 2004), as well as the actual covariation between felt closeness and beliefs of being understood, accepted, and cared for (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998) provide additional support. Hence, people generally seem to desire close relationships to be characterized by mutual responsiveness.

It is, however, worth noting two caveats. First, attachment researchers have uncovered considerable evidence that a small but significant proportion of people, those classified as avoidant, deny vulnerability, do not seek support and intimacy, and emphasize their own self-sufficiency (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) while still associating and socializing with other people (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). On the surface, this might be taken to indicate that avoidantly attached persons care little about partner responsiveness and, indeed, have some disdain for it if it requires, as it often does, being vulnerable and intimate. Yet, considerable evidence has been reported that their avoidance of intimacy and dependence is a self-protective veneer, and that even they show signs of desire for intimacy. In particular, they react with distress and arousal when rejected, signs that, we would note, belie their seeming lack of interest in responsiveness (Beck & Clark, 2008; Diamond, Hicks & Otter-Henderson, 2006; Roisman, Tsai & Chiang, 2004).

A second caveat relates to the fact that individuals characterized by attachment-related anxiety—that is, those who claim to fear abandonment by relationship partners—have been observed to display some discomfort when partners do act in communally responsive ways (Bartz & Lydon, 2006, study 2; Beck & Clark, 2008). This, especially when taken together with findings regarding the existence of people characterized by unmitigated communion, who provide support to partners but seem very reluctant to seek or accept support (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998), might also be taken to indicate the existence of a subset of people who do not desire to be recipients of partners' responsiveness. We suggest, however, as have others, that reluctance to seek responsiveness may arise from fears that dependency will not be met with responsiveness, and that initial acceptance and responsiveness might not be followed by sustained responsiveness across time. Thus, we maintain our claim that people, in general, desire responsiveness but note that self-protective defensive processes, at times, mask that desire.

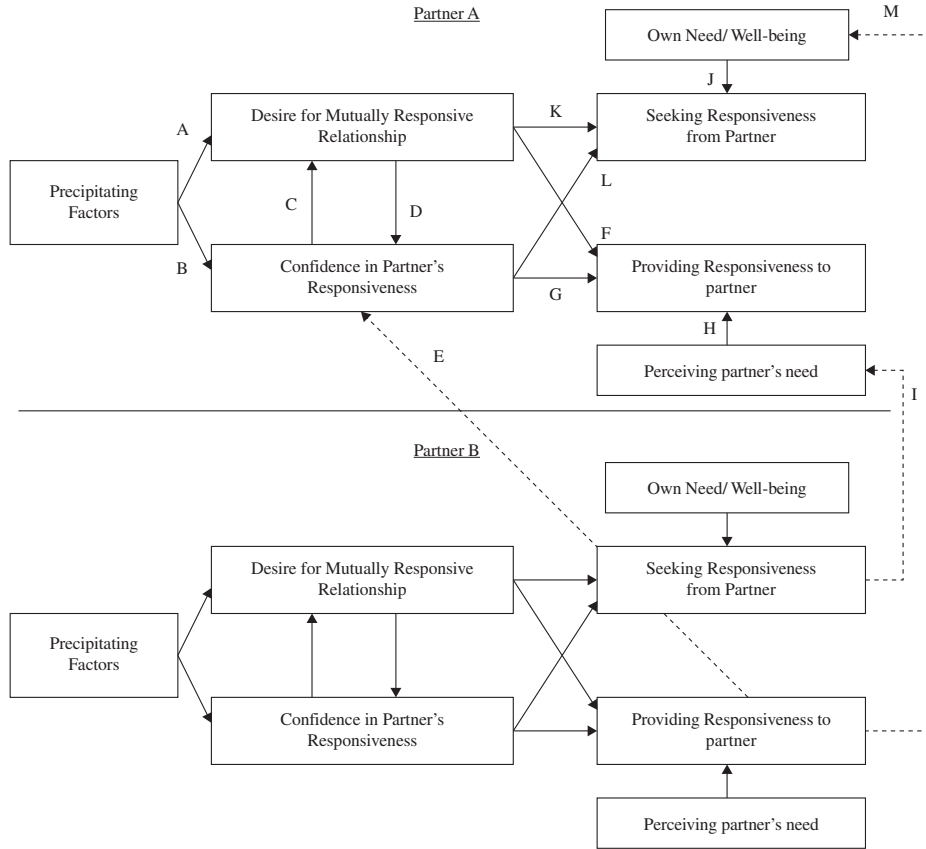
#### MODEL OF RESPONSIVENESS GIVEN AND RECEIVED

We present a broad, integrative model of responsiveness in Figure 25.1. In most of the remaining sections of this review, we describe empirical results that are broadly consistent with this model. The model posits that confidence in a partner's responsiveness and desire for a mutually responsive relationship are products of a variety of precipitating factors such as traits of the partner, traits of the perceiver, and the external environment. In addition, confidence in a partner's responsiveness and relationship desire mutually influence one another, and each cause both provision of responsiveness to a partner and seeking of responsiveness from a partner. Beyond confidence and desire, provision of responsiveness is thought to occur as a result of perceiving a partner's need for responsiveness, and one's own need is thought to drive seeking of responsiveness from the partner.

Figure 25.1 also illustrates coordination between partners (shown as dashed lines), such that one's partner's provision of responsiveness affects the other's confidence in responsiveness, relief of need, and promotion of well-being. Likewise, one partner's seeking of responsiveness affects the other partner's perceptions of that partner's need for responsiveness.

Figure 25.1 illustrates effects of "Partner B" on "Partner A." Of course, Partner A influences Partner B as well, but to minimize complexity, we omitted the analogous effects of "Partner A" on "Partner B." Figure 25.1 implies several feedback loops, which characterize a systems approach to close relationships (see Reis et al., 2000). For example, a





**Figure 25.1** An Integrative Model of Responsiveness.

state of need is a cause and consequence of the illustrated processes, such that the presence of a need (ideally) predicts seeking responsiveness, which causes the partner (ideally) to detect the need and provide responsiveness, which (again, ideally) alleviates the need. In addition, convergence across partners may occur through a conjunction of the illustrated processes. For example, one’s desire for a mutually responsive relationship may cause one to provide responsiveness, which increases the partner’s confidence in that responsiveness, which may increase that partner’s desire for a mutually responsive relationship.

What Figure 25.1 does not include are some of the hurtful behaviors that commonly occur in relationships that our culture dictates ought to be responsive and communal in nature but, in practice, may not be. Such behaviors exist and will be raised in connection to the model as exceptions to the links depicted in that model.

Our discussion of the model shown in Figure 25.1 starts with “precipitating factors” (Paths A and B) or, in

other words, factors that influence whether people desire responsive relationships with a particular other (Path A) and have confidence in the target’s potential responsiveness toward them (Path B). Many precipitating factors influence both desire and confidence so they are discussed together here.

**Path A: Precipitating Factors That Motivate Desire for a Close, Responsive Relationship**

A number of “background factors,” such as individual differences in both partners and qualities of the relationship environment may determine whether people desire to form and maintain a mutually responsive relationship with a particular partner.

*Nepotism*

In thinking about what drives people to be motivated to be responsive to one another, we commonly think of factors

that drive physical attraction to others (such as beauty) or ones that influence liking for potential partners (e.g., they are kind). Yet, there are other, very important factors that seem to motivate forming responsive bonds with others, particularly our kin. With the exception of romantic partners (who are rated the closest), people feel closer to kin than nonkin. Moreover, the degree of felt closeness varies with the degree of genetic relatedness. However, there are individual differences in these effects (Neyer & Lang, 2003). Among close relatives people tend to feel more responsiveness toward and to expect more responsiveness from those with the closest biological ties (e.g., more responsiveness is felt toward and expected from mothers than aunts), and among those with equally strong ties they tend to feel more responsiveness toward and to expect more responsiveness from female than male relatives (Monin, Clark, & Lemay, 2008).

Much evidence has been reported to suggest that we may be hardwired to form attachment bonds with our own infants and with other kin (Bowlby, 1969). Increasing evidence has also been reported suggesting that hormones such as oxytocin function to bind parents to offspring (see Pedersen, 2006 for a commentary on this and Feldman, Weller, Zagoory-Sharon, & Levine, 2007) and to bind sexual partners, who will be the basis of new kinship ties, to one another (Floyd, 2006). Levels of this hormone in the bloodstream are linked to levels of trust in humans (Kirsch et al., 2005; Kosfeld et al., 2005). There do seem to be individual differences in these effects. Feldman et al. [2007] and many others have suggested that both our natural tendencies to form attachment bonds and the natural functioning of systems involving oxytocin can be disrupted by negative experiences within relationships.

Of course cultural dictates also motivate a sense of duty to kin. Thus, duty and biological factors are factors that push us toward responsiveness to others, and these factors can operate even in the absence of liking for these people.

#### *Pre-existing Bonds with Others*

If maintaining mutually responsive bonds is a need that can be satiated, people should be especially eager to establish a relationship with any particular new potential partner to the extent to which they lack such bonds elsewhere (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995). People who have just lost a particularly strong communal bond through death or divorce, or perhaps most commonly, through moving to a new physical location may be especially interested in forming close relationships with new individuals. Consistent with the idea that people who lack close bonds ought to be especially attracted to others, reminding people about social rejection from a current partner increases their interest in meeting new people (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007, studies 1 and 2; see also Williams & Sommer, 1997).

In addition, a number of studies have now provided evidence that people who have established romantic relationships characterized by commitment are less prone to have their attention captured by attractive alternatives (Maner, Gailliot, & Miller, 2009; Maner, Rouby, & Gonzaga, 2008; Miller, 1997), and that when they do attend to attractive others, they judge them to be less attractive than do people who are available for new relationships (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Lydon, Fitzsimons, & Naidoo, 2003; -, Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990). In addition, partners in committed, happy relationships appear biased to perceive their relationship to be better than the relationships others have (Buunk, 2001; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000), and thus ought to be less interested in alternative relationships than others will be. For all these reasons, and perhaps more yet to be discovered, existing relationships are important determinants of the likelihood of forming new close relationships with additional target persons.

The degree to which establishing a new relationship would disrupt pre-existing bonds also seems to influence attraction toward new partners. People report less commitment toward romantic partners when they believe that other partners disapprove of the relationship (Cox, Wexler, Rusbult, & Gaines, 1997; Lehmiller & Agnew, 2006). In contrast, approval of the relationship from one's broader social network predicts relationship persistence (Sprecher & Feilmlee, 1992).

#### *Qualities of the Target*

Various partner assets in the interpersonal "marketplace" may enhance one's attraction to current or potential partners. Perhaps the most researched of these assets is physical attractiveness, which clearly does enhance attraction (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a; Huston & Levinger, 1978; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966) and predicts desires to maintain bonds in ongoing relationships (Lemay, Clark, & Greenberg, in press). From an evolutionary perspective, people may desire attractive relationship partners because attractiveness signals (or at least signaled during our evolutionary history, if not today—see Kalick, Zebrowitz, Langlois, & Johnson, 1998) health, and hence low threat of contagion (Thornhill & Gangestad, 1999). So, too, does the cultural value people place on beauty likely account, in part, for our liking of the physically attractive.

Other interpersonal assets that enhance attraction include qualities such as intelligence, popularity, or assertiveness. People may desire such qualities in their relationship partners to the extent that outcome dependency is high and these qualities are anticipated to fulfill personal goals (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Cottrell et al., 2007). In addition, having partners with such desirable qualities sometimes boosts

one's own feelings of self-worth or one's own sense of being interpersonally desirable through a process in which the partner is thought to reflect on the self (Cialdini, Borden, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, & Sloan, 1976; Tesser, 1988) and, indeed, may actually reflect (Sigall & Landy, 1973) on the self. The extent to which such reflection is a concern may vary across individuals. For instance, narcissists—those with low desires for intimacy and grandiose, volatile self-concepts—especially desire to have “perfect” relationship partners (e.g., popular, attractive, athletic, successful), in part because they anticipate feeling better about themselves and being more popular if they had such partners (Campbell, 1999). Similarly, some evidence suggests that individuals with low self-esteem may be especially concerned with reflection (Lemay & Clark, 2009; Tesser, 1988; Tesser & Cornell, 1991). This is a matter of degree, however, for even non-narcissists and individuals with high self-esteem tend to be attracted to partners with many of these interpersonal assets, and Tesser (1988) conceived of reflection as a largely normative process with which everyone is concerned at times.

A partner's positive qualities, however, can reduce attraction if individuals make upward social comparisons. The self-evaluation maintenance model posits that people are less attracted to individuals who outperform them in a domain that is highly relevant to self-definition, and some findings support this view (Tesser, 1988). Importantly, affective reactions to social comparison appear to be moderated by the established degree of closeness. In relationships that are already close, the threat of upward comparison seems mitigated by empathic, positive affective reactions to a close other's positive performance (Beach, Tesser, Fincham, Jones, Johnson, & Whitaker, 1998). In very close relationships, a cognitive inclusion of the other in the self (see Aron & Fraley, 1999) also seems to operate independently of empathic effects, such that positive outcomes for others are experienced as positive outcomes for the self (McFarland, Buchler, & MacKay, 2001). Priming of self as distinct causes contrast effects in social comparison, such that people feel better when exposed to unsuccessful relative to successful others, whereas priming of self as related causes assimilation effects, such that people feel more positively about themselves when exposed to a successful relative to unsuccessful comparison target (Stapel & Koomen, 2001; see also Gabriel, Carvallo, Dean, Tippin, & Renaud, 2005; Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002). When a close partner outperforms the self, people also may focus on their connection with the partner, and being connected to a desirable partner may be a means of indirect self-enhancement (Lockwood, Dolderman, Sadler, & Gerchak, 2004; see also Locke & Nekich, 2000). In contrast, upward comparisons seem threatening when closeness is not already established, although such comparisons seem rare

during interaction (Locke & Nekich). Also, upward comparisons even with currently distant others may not be threatening if people have expectancies that they can be similar to the other on the comparison dimension (Collins, 1996).

### *Similarity/Dissimilarity*

Broadly speaking, whether a target person's dissimilarities and similarities cause people to become attracted to one another has remained an area of interest to relationship researchers and, as it has, it becomes clear that neither the claim that “opposites attract” nor that “birds of a feather flock together” is clearly true or false. Instead, a more nuanced approach that takes into account interpersonal and intrapersonal processes better serves our understanding of this issue.

Some evidence has been reported that people desire partners who are distinct from themselves. For instance, evidence exists that people prefer complementary interaction partners on the dominance-submissiveness dimension (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; see also Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003) presumably because that combination allows both people to behave as preferred within a relationship. Of course, the literature on social comparison just mentioned also suggests that in performance domains, at least, another person's good performance may threaten one's own sense of competence in that same domain, leading one to experience negative emotion (e.g., DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988) and to prefer or feel more comfortable with a person “opposite from the self” in performance skills. For instance, a person who excels in acting may be most comfortable with a person who would never consider acting but loves doing scientific research. If the scientist performs well, the actor will not suffer from painful comparisons and can bask in that person's glory. Indeed, some evidence exists that we seek complementarity with relationship partners in performance domains, are more comfortable around people who are distinct from us in performance domains, and are attracted to such people (Beach, Whitaker, Jones, & Tesser, 2001). Finally, it is also the case that Aron and his colleagues' work on including the other in the self (Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, Mashek, Lewandowski, Wright, & Aron, 2004) suggests that a partner who is distinct from the self may facilitate the positive feelings that accompany such expansion, and this provides yet another reason why people with distinct attributes or those who are different in some ways (if not exactly opposite) may be attracted to one another (see Aron, Steele, Kashdan, & Perez, 2006 for male participants).

Yet it is simultaneously true (and not contradictory) that similarity draws people together. Researchers found this long ago (Byrne, 1971; Byrne & Griffitt, 1973; Newcomb, 1961), and recent research reaffirms that similarity in

attitudes, demographic variables, and activity preferences do, in fact, draw people together (Klohn & Luo, 2003; Singh, Ng, Ong, & Lin, 2008). It is also now clear that these effects cannot be attributed merely to discoveries of dissimilarity producing repulsion (Drigotas, 1993; Smeaton, Byrne, & Murnen, 1989) as had once been suggested, although dissimilarity clearly can lead to avoidance or distancing from people (Drigotas, 1993). At the same time, new research shows that different types of similarity may well be more or less important to different people (see Jamieson, Lydon, & Zanna, 1987), perceived similarity may be distinct from actual similarity (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002), and similarity itself may be more or less important to different individuals (see Michinov & Michinov, 2001). Still, although our understanding of exactly how similarity influences attraction is certainly becoming more nuanced, the finding that similarity does attract people to one another remains one of social psychology's most replicated findings.

New research offers more support for established thinking about the processes through which similarity may lead to greater attraction, as well as new evidence about additional processes that are influential in this regard. As suggested early on, others' similarities may be affirming and make us feel good (Byrne & Clore, 1970; Singh, Yeo, Lin, & Tan, 2007), they enhance trust that the other will reciprocate liking and care (Condon & Crano, 1988; Singh et al., 2007) and they lead to more positive evaluations of potential partners (Montoya & Horton, 2004; Singh et al., 2007), which, we note, may facilitate positive reflection processes. Intriguingly, thinking about similarity (rather than uniqueness) also seems to push us to focus on partners as part of a unit, a "we," and to reduce feelings of defensiveness and that may also draw us toward other similar potential partners (Tesser, Beach, Mendolia, Crepaz, Davies, & Pennebaker, 1998).

Are these the only processes through which similarity has its potent effects? Probably not, for current research also suggests an intriguing new mediating process that seems decidedly less rational. In particular, Burger, Messian, Patel, del Prado, and Anderson (2004), and Miller, Downs, and Prentice (1998) all found evidence that similarities in such mundane things as people's birth dates, names, and even fingerprints (if pointed out) increase cooperation between people, and Jones, Pelham, Carvalho, and Mirenberg (2004) reported studies showing striking links between such similarities and liking. They argue for a sort of "implicit egoism" that occurs whereby when people note even mundane similarities between the self and a partner, they will automatically and without effort come to have positive reactions to that partner. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that, as mentioned

earlier, when it comes to similarity in generally desired attributes (e.g., physical attractiveness), similar people may end up together not because similarity leads to greater attraction, but rather because of everyone desiring partners with the best attributes but people either settling or being forced to settle for those they can "get." It is also important to keep in mind that similar people may end up together because they choose to enter similar situations. Thus they may simply be more likely to meet one another and become attracted.

#### *Activated Thoughts Relevant to Other Relationships*

Newer research also suggests that qualities of new targets may activate concepts of relationship (or past relationship) partners who share those qualities, with implications for whether people approach or avoid the new target (Andersen & Chen, 2002). For instance, it is now clear that if attributes of a new person remind us of attributes of someone with whom we have had a good or a bad relationship in the past, then judgments from the past and affective feelings from specific past relationships feed forward and influence whether we feel attracted to or repulsed from the new partner. This can occur even when the attributes of a new person that "prime" thoughts about existing or past relationships are quite trivial and seemingly relationship irrelevant. For instance, the hair color or voice of a new person may influence our desire for a relationship with that person not necessarily because we care about those attributes, but because they bring to mind feelings about another person who shared those attributes.

Moreover, this occurs without our having to be aware of that fact (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 1996). When a current partner reminds us of a past partner for any reason, it does seem to bring back not just that relevant memory of the partner but many others as well (Glassman & Andersen, 1999). Moreover, because past partners may have had both good and bad attributes, it even appears that if a negative attribute of a potential partner reminds us of something negative about a past partner about whom we *also* happen to have had some very positive feelings, the same negative trait in a new person ironically can, through priming, elicit positive feelings. For instance, Berenson and Anderson (2006) observed that when women who were abused by parents met a new person who reminded them of that parent, they experienced both enhanced dysphoria *and* enhanced positive feelings (presumably because even abused children likely have positive as well as negative memories of their parents). Sadly, this may be one reason people are sometimes attracted to others who are not "good for them."

Other likely nonconscious effects that target attributes or behavior have on attraction include a person mimicking our

moves causing us to like them more (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999), primes of hostility somewhere in our environment causing us to like people less even though they did not cause the hostile prime (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982), primes of power causing us to approach people (Smith & Bargh, 2008), thinking of friends causing us to be helpful and responsive to entirely new individuals encountered soon after those thoughts have occurred (Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003), being primed with thoughts (e.g., names) of existing partners with whom we feel secure, anxious, or avoidant, influencing the nature of interpersonal goals we pursue when with new people (Gillath, Mikulincer, Fitzsimons, Shaver, Schachner, & Bargh, 2006), and even feelings of physical warmth caused by something independent of a target person (such as holding a warm vs. iced drink) leading us to feel “warmly” toward another person, liking that person more and being more responsive to him or her (Williams & Bargh, 2008; Zhong & Leonardelli, 2008). Clearly, we do not always have control over or even conscious awareness of our momentary feelings of liking or urges to approach or help new people we meet. Yet, these feelings of liking and urges to approach or help are all linked to our concept of responsiveness, and thus may well influence the initiation of new relationships.

At the same time, some recent research suggests limits on the effects of nonconscious primes on our attraction toward others. Specifically, Kruglanski and Pierro's (2008) research suggests primes are most likely to have an impact on us when our cognitive resources are limited. (In their case, cognitive resources were low for “evening persons” tested in the morning and “morning persons” tested in the evening). The current bottom line to us seems to be that we now know such processes may be important “players” in relationship processes. Yet, much work remains to be done to nail down just when, for whom, how, and to what degree these unconscious processes influence relationship processes.

#### *Attachment Dimensions*

According to Bowlby (1969), early interactions with significant others generate expectations and beliefs that guide interpersonal perception and behavior in adulthood. Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed a framework of how such expectations and beliefs operate in adult romantic relationships. Many attachment theorists distinguish such perception, beliefs, and behavior into two primary dimensions, commonly termed “attachment-related anxiety” and “attachment-related avoidance” (see Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991 for an early dimensional model; and Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Collins & Read, 1990; Fraley & Waller, 1998; Fraley, Waller & Brennan, 2000; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Secure individuals are thought to be low on both anxiety and avoidance.

People high on the anxiety dimension tend to worry and ruminate about abandonment by close others. Hence, such individuals chronically desire responsive relationships. For instance, relative to secure individuals, they report more distress over separating from their romantic partners (Fraley & Shaver, 1998), are over involved in others' problems (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998), show chronic activation of proximity-related concepts (Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddis, & Nachmias, 2000), hold strong goals to win others' approval (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2006), exaggerate the extent to which they are similar to others (Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998), and report especially strong desires for closeness (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Low self-esteem, a conceptually and empirically related construct, seems to be associated with a form of vicarious self-enhancement in which associations with others are used to regulate feelings of self-worth (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Schutz, 1998; Schutz & DePaulo, 1996; Schutz & Tice, 1997; Suls, Lemos, & Stewart, 2002).

The avoidance dimension refers to desires for minimal emotional and psychological investment in close others. Relative to secure individuals, individuals high on this dimension are uninterested in forming strong attachments. They avoid “socially diagnostic” situations in which they will find out whether another is interested in a responsive relationship with them (Beck & Clark, 2009a). They are not strongly committed to getting married, are less likely to be married, and are more likely to get divorced (Klohnen & Bera, 1998). They are less likely to fall in love (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) and their limited interaction with opposite-sex partners may suggest an avoidance of romantic relationships (Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996). They seem relatively unattached to their existing partners, being especially adept at suppressing thoughts about a partner's abandonment (Fraley & Shaver, 1997), reporting less emotional distress when their relationships actually dissolve (Simpson, 1990), reporting weaker feelings of commitment to romantic partners (Simpson, 1990), and exhibiting less desire to maintain contact during separation (Fraley & Shaver, 1998). Their especially low feelings of similarity toward others suggest they do not feel a sense of connection with others (Mikulincer et al., 1998; see also Gabriel et al., 2005). Their emotional responses also suggest minimal attachment. They show reduced emotional expression (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Klohnen & Bera, 1998) and experience more negative affect in their interactions (Simpson, 1990; Tidwell et al., 1996). They seem rather uninterested in others' emotion as well, showing reduced encoding of others' emotions (Fraley, Garner, & Shaver, 2000) and relative lack of interest in learning about their romantic partner's thoughts and feelings (Rholes, Simpson, Tran, Martin, & Friedman, 2007).

These general proclivities to avoid closeness seem to be applied to new relationship partners, especially if those partners resemble prior partners (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006). In terms of social process, it seems fair to say that avoidant people are people who self-protect by literally avoiding closeness, as defined in this chapter, either by sidestepping relationship formation altogether or by resisting mutual responsiveness within dating relationships and friendships that, normatively, are close.

Other individual differences, such as differences in relational-interdependent self-construal (Cross et al., 2000) and unmitigated communion (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998) seem to similarly reflect chronic differences in desires to establish close, mutually responsive relationships.

Consistent with attachment theory, these individual differences in tendencies to feel anxious or avoidant in regard to close relationships seem to have roots in early interpersonal experiences. Secure individuals describe their parents as more consistently responsive relative to anxious and avoidant individuals (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Collins & Read, 1990; Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998). Avoidant individuals are especially likely to have experienced conflict with parents or a death of a parent in childhood (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Klohnen & Bera, 1998). In an impressive longitudinal study spanning several decades, relationship quality in young adulthood was predicted by feelings of attachment security in adolescence, which, in turn, was predicted by peer competence in childhood, which, in turn, was predicted by attachment security in infancy (Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007; see also Collins, Cooper, Albino, & Allard, 2002). These individual differences in attachment anxiety and avoidance likely act as “external” causes of relationship desire or lack thereof.

### **Proximity**

Closeness in physical space also seems to predict attraction. Students randomly assigned to sit next to each other during a classroom task were more likely to be friends a year later relative to students sitting in the same row, who were, in turn, more likely to be friends than students sitting in other rows (Back, Schmukle, & Egloff, 2008). These findings confirm the importance of a mundane determinant of relationship formation identified long ago (Bossard, 1932) and replicate the classic finding that proximity of living quarters predicts formation of friendships (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950). From the perspective of our model, this is hardly surprising because it is difficult to be responsive to others without coming into contact with them. Of course people may come into close contact because they share similarities. However, even assuming suitable relationship

partners are randomly distributed across physical space, people may be more likely to satisfy their needs to belong with proximal partners simply because those others come into contact with them first. Even so what is very striking about some of these studies, is that they reveal that being right next door, directly across the hall (Festinger et al., 1950; Segal, 1974), or in an adjacent seat (Back et al., 2008) as opposed to just being in the same building or the same classroom makes a difference. Surely, one might think, it is worthwhile to search one’s immediate environment (those who live in one’s building or share classes) a bit more thoroughly than simply turning to the person one sits next to or lives next to in order to find the best available person with whom to form a mutually responsive, close relationship. In this regard, recent research on how much rejection hurts (MacDonald & Leary, 2005), as well as recent theorizing and evidence that people follow a risk-regulation strategy in forming relationships in which they balance appearing interested in and investing in relationships with protecting themselves from rejection (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006) may provide some insight. It suggests to us that very close, immediate propinquity may be as powerful a determinant of attraction as it is because conversing with or offering minor sorts of support to people whom one literally just runs into need not reveal that one has sought the other person out, whereas intentionally making one’s way down the hall or across the classroom to seek another out does communicate degree of interest. It may be people’s self-protective desire not to too openly reveal interest in others that makes them reluctant to even cross a room or walk down a hall to meet and get to know others.

### **Path B: Precipitating Factors Especially Likely to Predict Interpersonal Confidence**

“Background” factors about the self such as self-views, self-esteem, attachment anxiety, and match between self and partner may independently predict felt confidence regarding a partner’s current or potential responsiveness.

#### **Self-views and Self-esteem**

People with positive self-views and people with high self-esteem are more likely than those with negative self-views and low self-esteem to have a sense of confidence in potential or existing relationship partners’ responsiveness. Strong correlations exist between individuals’ perceptions of themselves and their perceptions of how others see them, and this pertains to specific views (e.g., personality traits, domain-specific abilities) and to global evaluation of the self (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Murray et al., 2000, 2001; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). Through

a projection of self-evaluation on the evaluations made by others, it appears that people who have negative thoughts or feelings about themselves naively assume that their partners have similarly negative thoughts and feelings. Moreover, people with low self-esteem seem to have a conditional sense of approval, feeling loved and valued by their partners only when they meet certain perceived contingencies. Response-latency studies revealing activation of rejection-related constructs in response to failure and acceptance-related constructs in response to success suggest that this contingent sense of approval can automatically bias judgments of others' responsiveness (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Such contingencies are also evident in studies in which participants with chronic low self-esteem, but not participants with chronic high self-esteem, react to intellectual failures (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998, study 4; see also Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2006), their own perceived transgressions (Murray et al., 1998, studies 1 through 3), and indeed, their own personal self-disclosures of failures (Cameron, Holmes, & Vorauer, 2009) with reduced confidence about their romantic partner's acceptance. (Sadly, much of this same work reveals that the low confidence of these individuals in their partner's regard is not grounded in reality. Their partners often regard them highly.) Interestingly, people with high self-esteem not only do have confidence in their partner's view of them, they sometimes perceive partners to have more positive views of them than those partners' self-reports suggest is the case (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009; Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002).

With regard to specific self-views, the stage of relationship is likely to determine which specific self-views are most relevant to inferring a partner's responsiveness. Having valuable social commodities, such as physical attractiveness or superb conversational abilities, likely most strongly affects confidence about relationship formation, whereas having valuable communal qualities, such as kindness and responsiveness, likely most strongly affects confidence about relationship maintenance. Indeed, those involved in romantic relationships show stronger correlations between their global self-esteem (thought to be an indicator of confidence in others' acceptance) and perceptions of their communal qualities relative to those not involved (Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007, study 2), and others' physical attractiveness is judged to be more important during initial stages of attraction than during maintenance of ongoing relationships (Sprecher, 1998).

#### *Match Between Self and Partner*

Beyond level of self-esteem, people also appear to consider the match between their own and their partner's social desirability. According to the matching hypothesis

discussed long ago by Walster and Murstein (see Murstein, 1972; Walster, Walters, & Berscheid, 1978), people expect to be rejected by those who are substantially more socially desirable than they are (e.g., physically attractive, personable, wealthy). Hence, they feel more confident in their ability to secure the romantic affections of those who are more or less similar to themselves in terms of general value on the social marketplace, despite the ideal of obtaining more desirable partners. In support of these ideas, research has consistently shown that romantic couples do tend to "match" in attractiveness. Murstein and Walster reported evidence for this effect early on, and the effect has been repeatedly replicated (see Lee, Loewenstein, Ariely, Hong, & Young, 2008 for a recent example). In addition, research has shown that confidence about a potential dating partner's acceptance is reduced when participants considered themselves to be unattractive or when the partner was highly attractive (Huston, 1973), and attractive male individuals were lower in fear of negative evaluation by women relative to unattractive male individuals (Reis et al., 1982). Again, relationship stage may play a role in these links. It is possible that when people are forming relationships they heavily weigh such matches (and the equity of what each member brings to the relationship), and that this emphasis fades as they move from a more deliberative phase of the relationship to an implemental phase, marked by high commitment (see Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, & Steller, 1990).

#### *Attachment-Related Anxiety*

As described earlier, attachment anxiety refers to individual differences in fears of abandonment by close others. Although high anxiety reflects, in part, high desire for closeness, it also reflects lack of confidence in others' responsiveness. These individuals exhibit automatic links between stress-related concepts and worries about separation and rejection (Mikulincer et al., 2000). They worry about their partner's love and commitment (Pierce & Lydon, 2001), especially if new partners resemble prior partners (Brumbaugh & Fraley, 2006), which suggests a transference of global models onto specific partners. Relative to individuals low in anxiety, individuals high in attachment-related anxiety perceive the same ambiguous behaviors committed by their partners as more upsetting, inconsiderate, and disappointing (Collins & Feeney, 2004). They also perceive more conflict in their relationships than their partners perceive, feel more hurt by those conflicts, and have exaggerated perceptions of the detrimental effects of conflict on their partner's satisfaction and optimism for the future of the relationship (Campbell et al., 2005). They report less trust in their relationship partner's responsiveness (Collins, 1996; Collins & Read, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer, 1998c; Simpson,

1990). Similarly, those high in rejection sensitivity (i.e., anxious expectations about rejection) perceive intentional rejection in the insensitive behaviors of their romantic partners (Downey & Feldman, 1996). These individual difference factors likely act as “background” or external predictors of confidence in a particular partner’s responsiveness.

### **Path C: Interpersonal Confidence Breeds Desire**

People seek to form close relationships with potential partners whom they believe are likely to respond supportively to the self. In ongoing relationships, they desire to maintain the relationship and contribute to its well-being if they perceive that partners are responsive. Likewise, they reduce their desire for a mutually responsive relationship when they doubt a partner’s responsiveness. This point has been made explicitly in Murray, Holmes, and Collins’ risk-regulation model (Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

Studies examining breakup as an outcome variable suggest effects on desire to remain in a relationship. In this respect, findings that unstable views of a partner’s commitment (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006), anxious expectations of rejection (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998), perceived lack of partner support (Srivastava et al., 2006), and negative views of partner’s communal qualities (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b) predict relationship breakup suggest that confidence in a partner’s responsiveness predicts relationship desire.

Other findings regarding evaluation and attraction to partners suggest a similar process in which desire is regulated in accord with confidence. Substantial correlations have been found between liking for a specific relationship partner and perceptions of that partner’s liking for the self (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). In romantic relationships, people seem to reciprocate evaluations, such that those who believe that they are evaluated positively by their partners evaluate their partners positively in return (Murray et al., 2000; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

People also freely report others’ liking as a reason for attraction (Sprecher, 1998). Such findings suggest that people view partners positively, which indicates approach motivation, to the extent to which they feel valued by those partners. Similar processes occur at the daily level as well; people with chronic doubts about their spouse’s regard appear to respond to their spouse’s daily negative behavior with reduced feelings of closeness (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). Believing that spouses devalue the self (in comparison with self-evaluations) also predicts reduced feelings of commitment and greater thoughts of divorce (Katz, Beach, & Anderson, 1996).

A common source of information regarding another’s liking for one, and hence a very common confidence builder

(or buster) in a partner’s likely responsiveness, is that other person’s emotional expressions. A person who smiles at one is likely to be seen as more attractive and judged more benevolently (cf. Reis et al., 1990) precisely because the person is seen as a responsive, warm individual. Likewise, a person with an angry expression may be disliked and avoided as a relationship partner precisely because that person appears not only nonresponsive but to exemplify the antithesis of responsiveness in that he or she may harm one’s welfare. Even young children seem to know that others who do not know one well will dislike you if you express anger (Zeman & Garber, 1996).

Studies of social support similarly suggest that confidence leads to desire. People who perceive their partners to respond supportively to their positive events (e.g., responding with enthusiasm) and to refrain from negative responses (e.g., quashing the event) tend to report high commitment to their partners (Gable et al., 2004), as do people who perceive their partners as responding supportively to their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). In addition to the emotional benefits of the support itself, people seem attracted to providers of help because of the underlying message that the provider has positive feelings toward the self and cares about one’s needs (Ames, Flynn, & Weber, 2004). In addition, those who believe that their partners are willing to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of the relationship claim a similar willingness for themselves (Van Lange, Agnew, Harinck, & Steemers, 1997). In the same manner, partners of women who respond to conflict with hostility and derogation (women high in rejection sensitivity) tend to report greater thoughts of ending the relationship after conflicts (Downey et al., 1998).

Of course, many of these correlational findings may be explained by a causal effect in the reverse direction or by third variables. Experimental studies provide clearer evidence for the direction of causality being discussed here. For instance, classic studies show that participants who were assigned randomly to receive negative feedback from an evaluator were subsequently less attracted to the evaluator relative to participants who were assigned to receive positive feedback (Deutsch & Solomon, 1959; Dittes, 1959; Jacobs, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971; Jones & Panitch, 1971; Shrauger & Lund, 1975). Such findings suggest a reduction in motivation to approach targets for relationship formation once people felt devalued. More recent experimental work suggests similar effects. People who believed they were chosen last for a team task derogated team captains, and this effect was explained by feelings of rejection (Bourgeois & Leary, 2001). This effect also extends to romantic relationships. Experimentally inducing doubts about a partner’s acceptance, such as by reminding individuals with



low self-esteem of their own prior transgressions, inconsiderateness, or failures (Murray et al., 1998), or by directly stirring their doubts about their partner's acceptance (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002), caused negative evaluations of partners, reduced felt dependence on partners, and/or reduced feelings of closeness to partners. Also, early studies on attraction suggest that beliefs about partners being attracted to the self predict desires to interact with those partners (Huston & Levinger, 1978), just as beliefs about partners being receptive to forming mutually responsive relationships predicts desires to form them (Clark, 1986).

Doubts about a partner's regard for the self brought about in less direct ways also seem to reduce interpersonal desire. For instance, according to the matching hypothesis described earlier (see Walster et al., 1966 and Walster & Walster, 1969), people not only feel more confident of acceptance by those who are within one's league, but they also expect and attempt to date individuals of similar desirability, and are even thought to like them more. Although several studies have failed to support this prediction, many of them suffer methodological limitations (Stroebe, 1977). Some studies do suggest that one's own attractiveness constrains selection of dating partners (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971). Likewise, people with low self-esteem doubt their partners regard when their partners seem to have superior interpersonal qualities, which, somewhat ironically, caused them to evaluate their partners negatively (Murray et al., 2005). This same phenomenon might explain the pratfall effect—a generally desirable individual tends to be even more liked when he or she exhibits some minor blunder or imperfection (Aronson, Willerman, & Floyd, 1966). Perceived similarity in attitudes seems to be another indirect manipulation of felt confidence; those who were led to believe that a stranger shared their attitudes regarding a variety of issues inferred that the stranger would be attracted to them, which, in turn, predicted their attraction to the stranger (Huston & Levinger, 1978; Singh, Yeo, Lin, & Tan, 2007, study 2), and reassuring people that they will be liked by others reversed the typical similarity-attraction effect for men (Aron et al., 2006).

In addition to positive regard, there is evidence that feeling validated and understood increases interpersonal desire. People seem to feel attracted to those who have matching subjective perspectives on the world, as when they have a similar musical taste or similar senses of humor (Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynski, 2006). Believing that partners are similar to the self may cause people to feel especially understood by those partners, which can enhance feelings of satisfaction independently of feeling positively regarded (Murray, Holmes, et al., 2002). Some findings

suggest that people are most attracted to potential romantic partners who provide both positive and self-consistent feedback, and are least attracted to those who provide neither (Katz & Beach, 2000). However, one important difference between positive regard and self-consistent regard is that the former has the capacity to threaten one's confidence in the partner's attraction and commitment. Indeed, with regard to feedback that is viewed as highly relevant to relationship functioning or the partner's attraction and commitment, desires for positive regard seem to outweigh desires to receive feedback that is consistent with self-views (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; Murray et al., 2000; Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). In new relationships, in which commitment is especially uncertain, negative but self-verifying feedback may be especially threatening and cause reductions in felt closeness (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006; Swann, de la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994).

Beyond relationship length and relevance to partners' commitment, individual differences in self-esteem and attachment security may predict the relative dominance of regard and understanding goals. People with low self-esteem seem more adversely affected by negative evaluation relative to people with high self-esteem (for a review of early literature, see Jones, 1973). Findings that individuals with low self-esteem are less likely than individuals with high self-esteem to seek feedback that confirms a negative specific self-view are consistent with this view (Bernichon, Cook, & Brown, 2003), as are findings that individuals with low self-esteem prefer to interact with globally accepting partners, regardless of whether they provide self-verifying feedback (Rudich & Vallacher, 1999). Murray and colleagues, in tests of their dependency-regulation model, tend to have found that individuals with low self-esteem, but not individuals with high self-esteem, evaluate their partners negatively and reduce feelings of closeness or dependence in response to manipulations about a partner's acceptance (Murray et al., 1998; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). Anxiously attached individuals similarly exhibit especially strong links between their perceptions of others' positive regard and their evaluation of others (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 2006). Similarly, they exhibited stronger relationships between their relationship-specific feelings of rejection and their reports of interaction quality and intimacy (Pierce & Lydon, 2001).

Do these effects represent differences in reactions or differences in perception? Some studies suggest that individuals with low self-esteem and those with high self-esteem equally desire positive regard from their close partners (Murray et al., 2000). It may be the case that findings of self-esteem or attachment differences in reactions to others' approval reflect a tendency for individuals with low self-esteem or insecure individuals to more readily believe that

they are truly rejected. Individuals with high self-esteem may more readily distinguish between negative evaluation of specific attributes and global rejection (see Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Indeed, in Murray and colleagues' research, these self-esteem differences are typically fully explained by measured perceptions of partners' acceptance (Murray et al., 1998; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002), and persuading individuals with low self-esteem to take their partner's positive feedback to heart renders them just as secure and satisfied as individuals with high self-esteem (Marigold, Holmes, & Ross, 2007). Such findings suggest differences in perceptions of rejection rather than differences in reactions to equivalently perceived rejection.

Some puzzling findings exist regarding effects of manipulations designed to increase perceived acceptance by romantic partners. Rather than causing individuals with low self-esteem to have especially positive evaluations of partners, such manipulations have sometimes been shown to have the unintended consequence of operating as a threat, causing individuals with low self-esteem to derogate partners and doubt partners' acceptance (Murray et al., 1998, studies 3 and 4). Similarly, as noted earlier, those with chronic attachment-related anxiety responded to knowledge about a potential relationship partner's use of communal norms with increased feelings of interpersonal anxiety (Bartz & Lydon, 2006, study 2). A similar effect has been reported by Beck and Clark (2008), who found that anxious people who experienced a mild acceptance manipulation (an attractive confederate in an experimental setting indicating that she would like to work jointly with the participant as opposed to working alone) responded with increased feelings of fear across time, as well as relative to changes in feelings of fear when receiving mild rejection feedback (the confederate indicating she wishes to work alone). Although surprising, such effects are striking and important findings. It may be the case that chronic distrust causes people to think of rejection in response to cues of acceptance perhaps because they especially fear rejection after beginning to think about acceptance. Fitting with this viewpoint are findings suggesting that people activate cognitions that are incongruent with a given message when they are primed to be distrustful (Schul, Mayo, & Burnstein, 2004).

This research does convincingly suggest a path between confidence in a partner's responsiveness and desire for a responsive relationship, with high confidence leading to high desire for a responsive relationship and a willingness to enter and maintain one, and low confidence preventing that, leading to doubt, and surprisingly even leading to partner derogation. However, the research does not reveal why this effect exists. Murray and colleagues (Murray et al., 1998, 2008; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Murray, Holmes, Aloni, Pinkus, Derrick, & Leder, 2009), fortunately, present an

elegant risk-regulation model suggesting that the key may be the presence or absence of a self-protection motive and they provide data to back their model. According to their model, people with low self-esteem tend to doubt their partner's responsiveness and perceive rejection risks to be high. This automatically activates a self-protection goal directing them away from situations that would lead to dependency on the partner and require trusting the partner. People who doubt a partner's acceptance therefore pre-emptively reduce the pain of rejection by devaluing their partners and their relationships. We find this perspective compelling.

Sadly, evidence has also been reported that the self-protection efforts of those low in self-esteem who doubt partner regard do not simply result in their devaluing partners and withdrawing from them. They may strike back at partners pre-emptively in hurtful ways that may cause the relationship to deteriorate (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). There is also evidence that when people who are chronically low in self-esteem feel threatened because social comparisons with their partner suggest they are inferior, an exchange script is automatically triggered together with the behavioral tendency to make heightened contributions to the relationship presumably to heighten the partner's dependence on them (Murray, Aloni, et al., 2009). The person with low self-esteem making the greater contributions is comforted by so doing, and the partner may well like the increased contributions to the relationship. However, the benefits of this "insurance policy" may be short-lived, for once an exchange script is adopted, the person making the greater contributions may come to feel inequitably treated in the longer run (cf. Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) and use of an exchange script has been linked with poorer relationship functioning in general (Buunk & Van Yperen, 1991; Murstein, Cerreto, & MacDonald, 1977). So, too, may feeling that a partner is sticking with one only because one has provided increased benefits undermine one's own sense that the partner truly cares for one.

It also could be the case that confidence in a partner's regard is a reward, which enhances relationship satisfaction and, in turn, commitment to the relationship (see Rusbult, 1983). In other words, the link may reflect approach in response to perceived responsiveness, in addition to avoidance in response to a lack thereof. Indeed, perceiving partners as responsive (i.e., willing to sacrifice for the relationship and accommodating) affects relationship commitment through its effect on satisfaction (and other indices of dependence) (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Approach motivation arising from perceiving partners as responsive also may be mediated through feelings of gratitude, which seem to increase in response to perceived responsiveness from partners, promote feelings of closeness and satisfaction, and motivate helping behavior (Algoe, Haidt, & Gable, 2008; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006). Gratitude, when

felt, may serve as a secondary signal to the help recipient that desired support has been received. When expressed, it may convey to the donor of support that it was welcomed and ought to be continued or repeated and has been shown to increase the expresser's perceptions of his or her felt communal strength toward the recipient (Lambert, Clark, Durtsch, Fincham & Graham, in press). It seems to us that gratitude likely serves its most important function in growing responsiveness in relationships when benefits slightly greater than what was expected by the recipient are both desired and received. It is possible, we suspect, for the magnitude of benefits to exceed what is desired, and thus to produce distress rather than gratitude. It also seems likely to us that receipt of benefits well within the range of what is expected will not elicit gratitude. The primary function of gratitude, we suspect, is to grow responsiveness in relationships.

In addition to self-protection in response to lack of partner responsiveness and relationship approach in response to presence of partner responsiveness, it also may be the case that perceiving partners as unresponsive undermines self-control or cognitive abilities (see Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005; Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002), which are thought to be needed for maintaining a pro-relationship orientation during threat (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Ayduk, Mendoza-Denton, Mischel, Downey, Peake, & Rodriguez, 2000; Ayduk, Mischel, & Downey, 2002; Finkel & Campbell, 2001; Vohs & Ciarocco, 2004; Warburton, Williams, & Cairns, 2006; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Feeling that one is victimized by a hurtful or rejecting partner also may reduce feelings of power, which may undermine reconciliation (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). As another potential process, some findings suggest that people may cope with rejection experiences by claiming to have chosen the rejection (Williams & Sommer, 1997), and such a process may involve claiming disinterest in perpetrators. This is subtly different from a self-protection mechanism, because it involves an attempt to explain prior events rather than preparing oneself for future events (i.e., mitigating future threat). Desire for revenge, perhaps to re-establish a belief in an orderly and just world, also may explain the effect of confidence on desire. Hence, additional studies that clarify the mechanisms underlying the confidence leading to the desire link seem necessary. Of course, multiple mechanisms ultimately may account for the link. It is our guess that they do.

Whereas a link between confidence and desire suggests that people desire partners' responsiveness, it may be the case that this effect is suppressed for people who do not generally claim to desire mutual, dependent relationships, or who have ambivalent feelings about having responsive relationships. For instance, as noted earlier in this chapter, people high in attachment avoidance claim to experience negative emotions and reduced attraction when their relationship

partners behave in a communal manner (Bartz & Lydon, 2006, 2008). Whether attachment avoidance truly reflects low desire for interpersonal bonds or whether it reflects defensive disavowal of dependence is a debated issue. Some evidence suggests the latter (for a review, see Shaver & Mikulincer, 2002); individuals high in attachment avoidance appear to actively suppress proximity-related worries when not "cognitively loaded" for other reasons, whereas they do show accessibility of such worries under cognitive load manipulations (Mikulincer et al., 2000; Mikulincer, Dolev, & Shaver, 2004) and elevated skin conductance while talking about separation from attachment figures (Dozier & Kobak, 1992). Moreover, their generally positive characterizations of self seem to be a response to distress and are more negative in situations that undermine defensive self-presentation (Mikulincer, 1998a). Some findings suggest that they have more negative views of self than secure individuals (Cooper, Shaver, & Collins, 1998). Trained judges perceive avoidant individuals as overly defensive and as repressing feelings of anxiety (Klohnen & Bera, 1998), and their high scores on social desirability scales and reduced accessibility of negative emotional events corroborate such views (Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995). In addition, some findings suggest that, contrary to their proclamations of independence, they feel positive emotion and boosts in self-esteem in response to interpersonal acceptance (Carvalho & Gabriel, 2006) and seem even more likely to feel calmed by their partner's support relative to secure individuals (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). Hence it is not clear whether the confidence to desire link is consistently moderated by individual differences in attachment avoidance. The link, we postulate, is always there, but outward behavioral manifestations may vary.

#### **Paths D and E: Relationship-Specific Predictors of Felt Confidence**

As shown in Figure 25.1, beyond effects of the precipitating factors described earlier, confidence in a partner's responsiveness is both rooted in reality, predicted by the partner's actual responsiveness-relevant behavior (see Path E, the dashed cross-partner line in Figure 25.1), and somewhat biased by the perceiver's desires for a mutually responsive relationship with the partner (Path D). That accuracy of something as important as a partner's responsiveness is considerably less than perfect and that perceptions are somewhat biased may seem surprising. Many factors likely contribute to this state of affairs.

First, consider that, in natural social interaction, explicit feedback regarding others' evaluation or liking is rarely given (Blumberg, 1972; Felson, 1980; Tesser & Rosen, 1975; Yariv, 2006), and there is evidence that this can

be especially true if the other is perceived to be highly “sensitive” to negative feedback (Lemay & Clark, 2008c), as well as some evidence that this can be especially true when dependence is high (Uysal & Oner-Ozkan, 2007, study 1), as it typically is in relationships. Instead, negative feedback is often expressed subtly, through nonverbal channels (Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & McNulty, 1992), if at all. In addition, when explicit feedback is given, it is often dishonestly positive (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996). (All new babies are cute. All new haircuts look good.)

One may think that people should be able to detect a partner’s sentiments. However, accurately detecting the sentiments underlying a partner’s behavior is a complex process that is likely to be error-prone. Any particular observed behavior may be attributed to a handful of potential causes. Indeed, research examining accuracy of perceptions has produced rather weak correlations between one’s beliefs regarding how one is viewed by others and others’ actual views. This pertains to others’ views regarding one’s specific abilities and others’ global evaluation of the self, although the latter seems somewhat more accurately detected than the former (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). For instance, in Walster et al.’s study cited earlier (Walster et al., 1966), participants’ perceptions of their dates’ liking and the dates’ actual liking was .23 for male and .36 for female individuals. In addition, round-robin studies have found moderate accuracy regarding how much one is generally liked by others, but virtually no accuracy regarding how one is differentially liked by different partners (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). This pattern pertains to social support as well. For example, participants reported receiving social support on only 65% of the days that their partners claimed to provide support, suggesting they missed many instances of support provision. They also reported receiving support on 44% of the days on which their partners claimed to not have provided support, suggesting many “false” perceptions of support receipt (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). Similarly, on average, laboratory observations of social support are only moderately related to recipients’ perceptions of support received (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney, 2004). Such moderate levels of accuracy may be difficult for people to reconcile with their feelings of confidence regarding their partners’ sentiments. Yet, such confidence is often based on only pseudo-relevant factors, such as informational complexity and richness (Gill, Swann, & Silvera, 1998). That is, although it may be the case that we have an abundance of detailed, vivid information about our relationships and partners, this does not necessarily mean we have very high levels of accuracy.

Often compounding the effect of communication barriers is the salience of one’s own interpersonal desires.

Research on social projection and false consensus suggests that one’s own salient attributes or goals tend to be attributed to others (e.g., Ames, 2004; Kawada, Oettingen, Gollwitzer, & Bargh, 2004; Krueger & Clement, 1994; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977; for reviews see Holmes, 1968; Marks & Miller, 1987; Robbins & Krueger, 2005). This projection occurs even in close relationships (e.g., Cobb, Davila, & Bradbury, 2001; Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Lemay, Pruchno, & Feild, 2006; Murray, Holmes, et al., 2002; Ruvolo & Fabin, 1999; Schul & Vinokur, 2000; Thomas, Fletcher, & Lange, 1997). Similarly, research on related biases suggests that the conclusions people draw regarding others’ judgments are often driven by an egocentric tendency to place undue weight on salient aspects of self (Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001; Savitsky & Gilovich, 2003). When discerning a partner’s responsiveness, it is likely that one’s own desire for a responsive relationship is very salient and, hence, very biasing.

Beyond such cognitive factors is the likely powerful motivation to see one’s desire reciprocated by partners. When people care for a partner’s needs, when they are committed to a partner, or when they are otherwise approach oriented or invested, they strongly desire reciprocation of these sentiments (see Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Consistent with the idea that strong motivations are often subjectively fulfilled (Bruner & Goodman, 1947), these desires may cause perceivers to see responsiveness in partners, even when “reality” contradicts such perceptions. Findings that positively biased perceptions of partners are tied to the importance of the domain for relationship quality (with perceived warmth and trustworthiness ranking high in importance) suggest such interpersonally motivated construal processes (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007; see also Kenny & Acitelli, 2001). These findings are reminiscent of the classic finding that people positively misconstrue others’ likability when they learn that they must interact with those others (Berscheid, Boye, & Darley, 1968; Tyler & Sears, 1977). Once a decision to invest in a relationship has been made (or made by somebody else), people seem to justify the investment by subjectively construing a responsive partner. To some extent, people in satisfying relationships even seem to be aware that their perceptions of their close relationship partners’ warmth and trustworthiness are positively biased (Boyes & Fletcher, 2007). By the same token, when people do not desire a highly responsive relationship, seeing lack of responsiveness in the partner can alleviate guilt (see Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994), stave off the temptation to invest in an undesired relationship, or orient self-protection mechanisms (see Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

This perspective provides a second interpretation of the observed correlations between perceived partner responsiveness and indices of relationship desire. Rather than it

reflecting only a unidirectional process in which perceived partner responsiveness is accurately detected (or affected by the precipitating factors noted previously) and then affects desire, it also may be the case that desire affects perceptions of the partner's responsiveness. Studies that model both accuracy and projection bias (by examining the unique predictive effects of indices of a partner's responsiveness and indices of own responsiveness on perceptions of the partner's responsiveness) actually tend to produce stronger evidence of bias than accuracy. This is the case in regard to perceptions of partner's recent caring feelings (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001), feelings of closeness (Cross & Morris, 2003; Kenny & Acitelli), intimacy goals (Sanderson & Evans, 2001), relationship involvement and satisfaction (Schul & Vinokur, 2000), and perceptions of the partner's motivation to respond to one's needs (Lemay et al., 2007). In each case, one's own standing was a strong predictor of perceptions of the partner's standing even after controlling for the partner's reports. Research on positive relationship illusions also provides evidence for this effect. People who claimed to have many communal attributes (e.g., warm, responsive to needs, patient, accepting) reported seeing their romantic partners as having similar communal attributes, independently of the partner's self-reported attributes (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a; Murray et al., 2000). Round-robin studies of liking suggest a similar process; whereas the actual reciprocity of liking between relationship partners has been observed to be moderate, the perception of reciprocity of liking has been observed to be substantial (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Levesque, 1997). Apparently, people who liked their relationship partners saw more reciprocation of liking than was warranted by those partners' reports. In a classic study of acceptance and rejection in small groups, group members perceived a substantial degree of congruence between their own sentiments and those of other group members, although the actual congruence of these sentiments did not exceed chance (Tagiuri, Blake, & Bruner, 1953). Likewise, comparisons of correlations suggest that perceptions that partners reciprocate one's commitment (Adams & Jones, 1997), one's provision of social support (Abbey et al., 1995; Brunstein, Dangelmayer, & Schultheiss, 1996; Deci et al., 2006; Trobst, 2000), one's self-disclosure (Brunell, Pilkington, & Webster, 2007), one's willingness to sacrifice for the relationship (Van Lange, Agnew, et al., 1997), and one's communal orientation (McCall, Reno, Jalbert, & West, 2000) are exaggerated in comparison with the partner's actual reciprocation. These findings suggest that people who desire a close relationship see the target of their desire as responsive, somewhat independently of the target partner's actual responsiveness as indexed by his or her self-reports. Related to these findings are findings that people attribute their own cooperative or competitive

choices in a Prisoner's Dilemma game to others, especially if the other is their game partner (Messe & Sivacek, 1979).

Individual differences in attachment-related avoidance, which reflect variability in explicitly claimed desire for mutually responsive relationships, have similar biasing effects. For instance, those who are high in avoidance perceive the same unsupportive messages written by their romantic partner as less supportive than individuals low in avoidance (Collins & Feeney, 2004), and they claim to trust their partners less (Mikulincer, 1998c). Reflecting a similar process, individuals who value relationships as aspects of their self-concepts seem to exaggerate their roommate's feelings of closeness (Cross & Morris, 2003). Of course, because these studies are correlational, these findings may reflect causal effects in the reverse direction or third variable effects.

Experimental studies provide clearer evidence for a desire to confidence effect. Although not focusing on responsiveness per se, some studies suggest goal-driven perceptions of others. Sexually aroused men perceived available women to be sexually receptive (Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971). Similarly, men who were primed with a mate-search goal perceived sexual arousal in attractive opposite-sex targets (Maner et al., 2005, study 1). These findings suggest that activating a desire for formation of a sexual relationship caused men to perceive women as responsive to their specific, salient need. This effect extends beyond the sexual domain. Manipulations designed to incite doubts about future social inclusion not only cause increases in desires for forming bonds with new individuals, but such desires seem to cause people to see new individuals as especially receptive to forming bonds (i.e., sociable) (Maner et al., 2007, studies 3 and 4). Desires to avoid the formation of trusting, responsive relationships seem to have opposite effects. For instance, priming self-protection goals caused people to see anger in the faces of members of outgroups that are stereotypically associated with physical threat (Maner et al., 2005, studies 1 and 2), and manipulating people to lie to others causes them to see others as similarly dishonest (Sagarin, Rhoads, & Cialdini, 1998).

This basic phenomenon has been extended to perceived care. When people were randomly assigned to experience difficulty recalling their own responsiveness to a partner's needs (Lemay et al., 2007, study 3), to recall a time in which they were not responsive to a partner's needs (Lemay & Clark, 2008a, study 1), or to behave in an unresponsive manner toward a new acquaintance (Lemay & Clark, 2008a, study 2), they perceived their partner as similarly unresponsive to the self. Therefore, causing people to feel that they do or do not care for a partner seems to cause analogous changes in confidence about the partner's responsiveness. Likewise, when participants felt close to a partner who outperformed them on an ostensible intelligence test (and

when they were motivated to dispel the threat of a superior partner or to bond with a desirable partner), they were especially likely to construe the partner as interpersonally responsive (Lockwood et al., 2004). More recent research suggests that desires to bond with physically attractive individuals explain why those individuals are seen as especially interpersonally responsive (Lemay et al., in press). In other words, beautiful people are seen as “good” people because they are desired relationship partners. This research suggests that the desire to confidence effect may be relevant to explaining the classic “beautiful is good” effect.

Even some studies designed to provide evidence of a confidence in a partner’s responsiveness to desire effect might be seen as providing evidence for the reciprocal desire to confidence effect. For instance, Murray and colleagues (1998, studies 1–3) found that priming individuals with low self-esteem to think about their own prior transgressions caused them to see their partners as less responsive (i.e., they perceived the partner to have less positive regard for the self). It is possible that the reminders of prior misdeeds convinced participants with low self-esteem that they are not responsive or do not desire a responsive relationship, which, in turn, affected their perceptions of the partner’s responsiveness. Likewise, in correlational work by Murray and colleagues (1996a, 2000), in which self-esteem was modeled as a predictor of evaluation of partner, the predictor—self-esteem—was measured by averaging self-ratings on a variety of attributes that largely referred to interpersonal responsiveness (e.g., responsive to needs, warm, tolerant, patient). The outcome measure—evaluation of partner—was evaluation of the partner on these same attributes. The finding that “self-esteem” predicted evaluation of the partner is consistent with the idea that individuals with high self-esteem evaluate partners positively. It is also consistent with the idea that people who care for partners see partners as caring in return.

Of course, some of a partner’s responsiveness is accurately detected. Many of the studies cited earlier suggest accuracy in perceiving partner’s commitment (Wieselquist et al., 1999), caring feelings (Kenny & Acitelli, 2001), closeness (Kenny & Acitelli), social support (Brunstein et al., 1996), willingness to sacrifice (Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997; Wieselquist et al.), constructive responses to conflict (Wieselquist et al.), motivation to respond to needs (Lemay & Clark, 2008a; Lemay et al., 2007), liking (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993; Levesque, 1997), intimacy goals (Sanderson & Evans, 2001), relationship involvement (Schul & Vinokur, 2000), regard (Murray et al., 2000; Overall et al., 2006), and daily expressions of support and affection (Gable, Reis, & Downey, 2003). In addition, people who are committed to their relationships have partners who trust them (Wieselquist et al.). Other findings are consistent with this notion. For

example, those who claimed to be caring and responsive to others have romantic partners who view them as caring and responsive (Murray et al., 2000). Laboratory studies have revealed positive correlations between a romantic partner’s supportive behavior as indexed by objective observers and the recipient’s perceptions of being supported, suggesting their perceptions of support were somewhat rooted in reality (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney, 2004). Likewise, laboratory studies have revealed positive correlations between a romantic partner’s observed hostile and derogating behavior and the partner’s feelings of anger (Downey et al., 1998).

Of interest are factors likely to moderate the degree to which people are reading their partner’s behavior for signs of responsiveness and the degree to which they use heuristics (i.e., their own desire) to infer a partner’s behavior. Individuals high in attachment-related anxiety imbue relationship events with heightened interpersonal meaning, such that the partner’s behavior is seen as especially diagnostic of the partner’s desire for a close relationship (Bartz & Lydon, 2006, study 3). Such individuals may avoid the use of the desire-driven biases outlined earlier. Indeed, high-anxiety participants seemed more accurate than low-anxiety participants in inferring their partner’s thoughts and feelings when such thoughts and feelings could threaten the relationship (Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999). Similarly, people with chronic fears of negative evaluation do not readily perceive new individuals as socially receptive, even when a prior rejection experience might motivate a desire for forming new bonds (Maner et al., 2007, study 4). Of course, these insecure individuals are undoubtedly biased in other ways (i.e., underestimating partners’ responsiveness). The stage of a relationship’s development may also constrain the use of a goal-driven bias. People who are in the process of establishing a close relationship seem to read more into the partner’s behavior relative to individuals who have already established closeness (Lydon, Jamieson, & Holmes, 1997), and people seem less likely to see partners in positively biased ways when they are deliberating about the future of the relationship, as opposed to when they have made a decision and are actively pursuing the relationship (Gagne & Lydon, 2004).

Will such subjectively constructed feelings of security satisfy people’s needs? In many cases, confidence in responsiveness should predict relationship outcomes largely irrespective of how that confidence was derived. Of course, there are limitations to the effect of self-generated confidence. For instance, it may cause people to overlook problems in their relationships that, if detected, could be remedied (see McNulty, O’Mara, & Karney, 2008) or could, perhaps quite wisely, serve as a cause for choosing to leave a relationship. Such possibilities are directions for future research. Yet, because doubts about a partner’s responsiveness can

undermine motivation to maintain responsive relationships, lack of a partner's responsiveness may not be the sort of problem that can be easily addressed once it is perceived and, ironically, may be better addressed by not perceiving it. Why? Perceiving partners to be more responsive than they are can create self-fulfilling prophecies in which partners become more responsive (Murray et al., 1996b), predict increased relationship satisfaction (Gable et al., 2003; Lemay et al., 2007; Murray et al., 1996a; Sanderson & Evans, 2001), and predict engaging in pro-relationship acts, such as self-disclosure, expressions of warmth, and support provision (Lemay & Clark, 2008a). Moreover, accurately inferring a romantic partner's thoughts and feelings predicts reduced closeness and increased probability of breakup (the latter for anxiously attached individuals) when such thoughts were threatening to the relationship (Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995; Simpson et al., 1999; Simpson, Orina, & Ickes, 2003).

People are not so likely to exaggerate a partner's care that they miss truly serious problems in the relationship, because large gaps between self and partner, although rare, may be especially likely to be detected. Confidence in a partner's responsiveness seems to provide many people with a means to feel secure in relationships despite the difficulty of reading others' motivations, thoughts, and feelings. In other words, the bias to feel confident when such confidence is most desired may be more beneficial and less costly than refraining from biases and limiting oneself to "bottom up" perception (see Haselton & Buss, 2000), as it aids in relationship formation and maintenance, as we discuss in the following sections. Whether such biases are primarily due to the cognitive mechanisms or the motivational mechanisms we described are directions for future research, although we would anticipate that both accessibility and desire for reciprocation play a role in the desire to confidence effect.

### **Paths F, G, H, and I: Enactment of Responsive Acts**

A desire for a mutually responsive relationship should predict provision of responsive support to relationship partners, because such behavior is normative in such relationships (Clark & Mills, 1979), and because increased interdependence and intimacy cause people to develop concern for their partner's welfare.

Consistent with this idea, people claim greater willingness to provide help to partners and potential partners with whom they would like to be close relative to relationship partners with whom they do not feel close and would not like to be close (Lydon et al., 1997). A feeling of "oneness" or merged identity with relationship partners, which may be another index of desire to maintain a responsive

relationship, predicts self-reported willingness to help partners in need (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). Such feelings of "oneness" also predict actual helping of strangers (Maner, Luce, Neuberg, Cialdini, Brown, & Sagarin, 2002). People who report intimacy goals in their close relationships provide more support to their partners (Sanderson & Evans, 2001). Experimental manipulations of closeness with new acquaintances eliminate the typical tendency to take credit for success and blame others for failure (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998), and experimental manipulations that activate feelings of closeness cause more empathic reactions to others' distress and a reduced focus on one's own personal distress (Mikulincer, Gillath, Halevy, Avihou, Avidan, & Eshkoli, 2001). So, too, do experimental manipulations that produce desire for a close, responsive communal relationship result in more help being given (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987), more responsiveness to partner's distressed affect (Clark et al., 1987), and more attention to a partner's needs (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986).

These effects may emerge because those who desire mutually responsive relationships are genuinely concerned for their partner's welfare. Recent studies by Batson and colleagues (Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Ortiz, 2007) support this idea. Those who were manipulated to value a stranger's welfare (by presenting the stranger as a compassionate and likable person) felt more empathic concern for the stranger, which, in turn, predicted increased helping behavior. Feelings of love also correlate with feelings of sympathy toward partners (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001). To say this, importantly, is not the equivalent of saying that those who desire mutually responsive relationships do so for entirely altruistic reasons. Rather, we suspect, people often may desire mutually responsive relationships for selfish reasons. They may know, for instance, that the very existence of such relationships will make them feel accepted, secure, and perhaps generative as well, so they adopt communal norms of responsiveness for the relationship. Other times, as with relatives, social or evolutionary forces may drive use of that norm, and still other times true empathy may drive it. No matter. Once it is adopted, they may also adopt the attitude and habit of focusing on the partner when the partner can be supported (and focusing on the self when the self needs support, as we describe in the next section), resulting in desire for the relationship, true empathic concern, genuine care, and responsiveness.

Relationship commitment, which is typically conceptualized as involving feelings of psychological attachment to a partner and a long-term orientation toward the relationship (Rusbult, 1983), may be another index of desire to maintain a mutually responsive relationship. People who are strongly

committed to their relationships report willingness to sacrifice some of their personal goals as a means of benefiting the relationship (Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Their willingness to exert themselves to benefit their partners also was experimentally observed (Van Lange, Rusbult, et al., 1997, study 4). Commitment also seems to promote pro-relationship responses to conflict, such as increased forgiveness (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998) and reduced negative reciprocity (i.e., reacting to negativity with negativity) (Rusbult et al., 1991; Wieselquist et al., 1999). The links between commitment and pro-relationship processes suggest to us that commitment is the point demarking individuals moving from a deliberative frame of mind regarding their relationships (i.e., carefully considering whether to establish or maintain a relationship) to an implemental frame of mind (i.e., deciding to establish or maintain a relationship) (see Gollwitzer et al., 1990).

Individual differences in desire for responsive relationships also predict provision of responsiveness. Relational-interdependent self-construal, a tendency to construe the self in terms of relationships with close others, is correlated with self-reported desires for mutually responsive relationships (communal orientation) (Cross et al., 2000, study 1), a tendency to take other's needs and wishes into account when making decisions (Cross et al., 2000, study 2), and greater accuracy in predicting new relationship partners' values (Cross & Morris, 2003).

To the extent that attachment avoidance reflects a defensive lack of desire for mutually responsive relationships, findings regarding avoidance also suggest a link between desire and provision of responsiveness. Individuals high in attachment avoidance provide less responsive support (e.g., less physical affection, less sensitivity to partner's needs, less emotional support, more neglect) to their romantic partners relative to individuals low in attachment avoidance, and they appear to do so, in part, because they feel less committed and close to their specific partners and, in part, because they are less empathic and communally oriented generally (Feeney & Collins, 2001). Indeed, attachment avoidance is associated with reduced empathic reactions to others' distress (Mikulincer et al., 2001) and reduced willingness to help others in distress (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005), and avoidant individuals and their partners report avoidant individuals to be critical and aggressive (Collins et al., 2002). Similarly, avoidant individuals were less likely to provide responsive caregiving to alleviate a partner's distress while parting with those partners at airports (Fraleigh & Shaver, 1998) and in laboratory observations (Simpson, Rholes, Orina, & Grich, 2002; see also Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Moreover, laboratory observations of their behavior indicate they are less

warm and supportive toward their romantic partners than are low avoidance individuals when discussing a major relationship conflict (Simpson et al., 1996). When they do help their romantic partners, they report more self-focused motivations for providing the help (i.e., to reduce one's own costs or reap rewards) and fewer motivations related to care for the partner (Feeney & Collins, 2003). When they themselves are distressed, avoidant individuals seem to respond to a partner's lack of support or a partner's anger with reciprocated anger, frustration, and statements expressing unhappiness with their partner (Rholes, Simpson, & Orina, 1999; see also Mikulincer, 1998b). In contrast, individuals low in avoidance responded to the same situation with reductions of such negative responses. Hence, evidence strongly suggests that various indices of desire to form close, mutually responsive relationships are associated with provision of responsiveness to partners.

As shown in Figure 25.1, confidence in a partner's responsiveness may independently predict responsive behavior toward the partner (Path G). As people may be unwilling to invest in relationships in which partners are unresponsive, people who are insecure about a partner's responsiveness may feel compelled to be focused on their own needs rather than the partner's needs. In addition, providing responsiveness requires trust that partners desire such responsiveness from the self. Consistent with this overall idea (and the specific idea that confidence may influence people to be self-protective), people who doubt their particular spouse's regard respond to daily feelings of rejection with hurtful behaviors toward their spouse (Murray, Bellavia et al., 2003). In contrast, those who perceive their partners as supportive exhibit constructive behaviors (e.g., listening, trying to understand, refraining from criticism) during conflict situations (Srivastava et al., 2006, study 2) and report providing support in return (Deci et al., 2006). People who perceive their partner to be secure (i.e., trusting, comfortable with closeness) provide more support while their partners discuss personal goals relative to those who perceived insecure partners (Cobb et al., 2001). Studies testing circumplex models of interpersonal behavior not only find that agreeable and quarrelsome behavior is reciprocated, but also suggest a tendency for people to provide responsiveness only when they are certain of receiving responsiveness (Markey, Funder, & Ozer, 2003; Moskowitz, Ho, & Turcotte-Tremblay, 2007; Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003).

Experimental manipulations of confidence suggest a similar pattern. People who feel rejected by a target person (i.e., low confidence in responsiveness) allocated fewer rewards to that target relative to people who did not feel rejected (Maner et al., 2007, study 5). People who were led to feel noncontingently accepted (i.e., based on their true selves)



showed less defensiveness, including reduced tendencies to engage in downward social comparisons and reduced distancing from an undesirable person relative to people who felt that their acceptance was contingent (based on performance) (Schimmel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001). Activating concepts of attachment security similarly causes more empathic reactions to others' distress and a greater willingness to help others (Mikulincer et al., 2005), and activates communal goals such as kindness and warmth (Bartz & Lydon, 2004; Mikulincer et al., 2003).

A similar pattern is found using individual difference variables that tap confidence in responsiveness. Participants with partners high in attachment anxiety received less support from those partners after discussing a personal problem relative to participants with partners low in attachment anxiety. Instead, such anxious partners engaged in seemingly defensive negative behaviors, such as blaming, minimizing the importance of the problem, or ignoring emotional displays (Collins & Feeney, 2000). In part, anxious partners' intentions to punish partners and engage in conflict seem to be a result of their tendencies to doubt their partner's responsiveness (Collins, 1996; Collins, Ford, Guichard, & Allard, 2006). For anxiously attached women, increases in personal distress were related to subsequent increases in negative behaviors such as derogating the partner, and expressing anger and distrust toward the partner. In contrast, personal distress was inversely related to such reactions for women low in attachment anxiety (Rholes et al., 1999). Similarly, women high in rejection sensitivity—*anxious expectations of being rejected by others*—expressed hostility and derogated their romantic partners during an observed interaction (Downey et al., 1998). These various findings point not only to a link between confidence in a partner's responsiveness and provision of responsiveness, but also to a link between lack of confidence in a partner's responsiveness and behavior that is the antithesis of responsiveness.

In many ways, it is paradoxical that anxious individuals who are hypersensitive to issues of responsiveness and those especially wary of rejection act in ways that likely drive partners away from them. Their behavior has been explained as "pre-emptive" defense. That does make a certain amount of sense because rejecting the other before the other can reject you may hurt less than relying on another and then not receiving support or even being actively hurt by them. Moreover, pre-emptive attacks may result in one feeling "in control" of the situation. Yet, defensiveness is self-serving only in the moment. Attacking one's partner certainly does nothing to promote the relationship and likely does much to harm it. Thus, it is reasonable to ask *why* people who are hypersensitive to issues of responsiveness do not consider the almost immediate negative reaction

their actions are likely to draw from partners along with the longer-term, almost certainly negative, consequences of such actions.

An analysis of how goal striving relates to relational focus of attention suggests an answer (Clark, Graham, Williams, & Lemay, 2008). Anxious, rejection-sensitive individuals or those with low self-esteem (all overlapping constructs) may have chronic self-protective goals and a chronic relational self-focus (meaning that when with partners they focus on the self and the implications of the partner for the self). Given the goal of self-protection and where their attention is focused, they may simply be attentionally blind to signs of partner needs and opportunities to support the partner (cf. Most et al., 2005; Simmons & Chabris, 1999). It may not be until after they lash out, thereby reaching their goal of immediate self-protection, that they can "see" the negative consequences of their behavior.

The same analysis of how goal striving relates to relational focus of attention has broader implications for how confidence in a partner's responsiveness relates to providing responsiveness to partners as well. Clark et al. (2008) suggest that people who have confidence in a partner's responsiveness tend also to have flexibility in relational focus of attention (i.e., where they focus when with partners). When the partner has a need, they can focus on the partner and what they can do for their partner, which ought to lead to providing appropriate responsiveness. When they have a need, they switch to focusing on the self and what the partner can do for the self (which ought to lead to seeking appropriate responsiveness, as discussed in the next section), and when neither person has a pressing need, they can focus on joint activities (e.g., a conversational topic, dancing, sexual activity), which will often result in providing different sorts of responsiveness to the partner as well. In contrast, people with low confidence in a partner's responsiveness tend to be stuck in relational self-focus (i.e., thinking about the self and the implications of the partner for the self), which may not only mean being less apt to notice cues to partner needs, but also, when such cues are noted, being especially apt to think of the implications of the neediness for the self than for the partner and consequently less apt to help the partner even when needs are noted.

Unfortunately, the same insecurity that leads people to focus on self and that undermines providing responsiveness, if expressed, has been shown to further undermine the expresser's insecurity. Some recent research, for example, suggests that continued expressions of heightened insecurity may perpetuate feelings of insecurity through providing insecure people with an external attribution for the partner's expressions of positive regard and affection (Lemay & Clark, 2008b, 2008c; Lemay & Dudley,

in press), and this lashing out may cause one to feel that one lacks the positive communal qualities that a partner desires, thereby perpetuating doubt about the partner's positive regard.

Even though, as just reviewed, much research suggests that a lack of confidence in a partner's responsiveness predicts not just low responsiveness toward a partner but also relationship-harming behavior, other findings also exist that instead suggest that lack of confidence in a partner's responsiveness predicts provision of responsiveness to the partner. For example, people with chronic attachment-related anxiety seem especially eager to follow communal norms with potential relationship partners (Bartz & Lydon, 2006, study 1). Moreover, relative to secure individuals, they wrote more emotionally supportive messages to their partners, and more instrumentally supportive messages when their partners were distressed (Feeney & Collins, 2001). In a daily diary study of support provision in romantic couples, people who claimed to be worried or fearful in their relationships provided more support to their partners relative to people who did not show this anxiety (Iida, Seidman, Shrout, Fujita, & Bolger, 2008; see also Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). These findings suggest a more complex picture than we have painted previously. Attachment-related anxiety reflects a *combination* of low confidence in a partner's responsiveness and high desire for the relationship. This combination may produce especially strong efforts to secure a responsive relationship, but the effect may be unstable because it likely depends on the degree of threat relative to the degree of desire. When desire is "greater than" threat, anxious people may seek to provide responsiveness to secure a close relationship. When threat is "greater than" desire, anxious people may defensively back away from the relationship. In addition and importantly, it is almost certainly the case that the help provided is motivated by qualitatively different factors. In particular, it is likely designed to alleviate the anxious person's own felt insecurity rather than to respond to a partner's needs. Fitting well with this idea is the fact that anxious attachment is correlated with feelings of personal distress and reduced feelings of empathy in response to others' needs (Mikulincer et al., 2001, 2005). Although they follow communal norms in close relationships, they are vigilant about others' reciprocation (Bartz & Lydon, 2008). Moreover, whereas all participants exhibited intimacy goals in trust-related contexts, anxiously attached individuals also exhibited goals to reduce their feelings of insecurity (Mikulincer, 1998c), and their motivations for helping more often include relationship concerns such as bolstering the partner's commitment, which, in turn, predicts compulsive, overinvolved forms of caregiving that, somewhat ironically, reduce partners' satisfaction (Feeney & Collins, 2003). They get overly involved with alleviating their romantic

partner's problems, and they appear to do so, in part, because they lack trust and they desire to reduce their own anxiety (Feeney & Collins, 2001; see also Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). They exhibit a manic, obsessive, overly dependent style of love (Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990). Thus, the support provided by anxiously attached individuals may be rather self-focused and ultimately often uncoordinated with partners' particular needs both in the sense that (non-responsive) "help" will be given when it is neither needed nor desired and in the sense that situations requiring help are likely to be "missed." Of course, it is also possible that appropriate help will sometimes be given, but the overall pattern of responsiveness is likely to be far from ideal. Fitting well with this argument, researchers have noted that anxious peoples' own self-disclosures (which can be responsive) are relatively uncoordinated with others' self-disclosures (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991) and, therefore, likely unresponsive to their needs.

In addition to being predicted by felt desire for and confidence in a mutual responsiveness relationship, the provision of responsiveness, ideally, should be sensitive to the partner's needs (see Path H in Figure 25.1). In laboratory studies, observed seeking of support from one's romantic partner while discussing a personal problem predicted the partner's provision of responsive caregiving as indexed by objective observers (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Simpson et al., 2002). Likewise, manipulated beliefs about a partner's distress predicted more emotionally supportive written messages to the partner, as indexed by outside observers and by the partner (Feeney & Collins, 2001). In daily diary studies, support provision was coordinated with romantic partners' anxious mood, daily stressors, and support seeking (Iida et al., 2008), and individuals gave less support to their partners and received more support from their partners as an upcoming personal, major stressor approached (Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008). That is, people seem to focus more on support provision than on support receipt when their partners' needs outweigh their own.

Hence, detection of partner's needs seems to be a critical determinant of responsiveness above and beyond the effects of desire and confidence for a mutually responsive relationship. Indeed, people are more likely to monitor another person's needs when they believe the individual is available to establish a close relationship (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986) or when the individual is already a friend (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989). Studies suggest that missing signs of need is detrimental to recipients' well-being. For instance, pregnant women with partners who underestimated their stressful life events were more likely to become more depressed from their second to the third trimester relative to women with partners who did not underestimate their stressful life events (Chapman, Hobfoll, & Ritter, 1997). In another study,

providing support to encourage a partner's goals predicted the partner's relationship satisfaction only if participants were well aware of their partner's most important goals (Brunstein et al., 1996). Such findings suggest the relevance of accurately detecting the nature of a partner's distress to efforts at promoting the partner's well-being.

Desire and detection of need also likely interact to predict responsiveness, such that detection of need promotes supportively responding to that need primarily when interpersonal desire is high. People who are high in attachment avoidance, who appear to have low desire for responsive relationships, responded to a partner's expressions of distress or support seeking with increased anger and less support. The opposite was the case for people low in attachment avoidance (Rholes et al., 1999; Simpson et al., 1992). Similarly, whereas low avoidance individuals provided more support to their romantic partners as their partner's distress increased, high avoidance individuals did not (Feeney & Collins, 2001). Individuals high in communal orientation, a proclivity to desire communal relationships with others, provided help that was commensurate with the recipient's sad mood, whereas individuals low in communal orientation did not increase helping in response to the other's sad mood (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987).

### **Paths J, K, L: Seeking Responsive Acts**

When people have a need, they ought to seek their partner's responsive acts (see Path J in Figure 25.1). Several findings suggest that, in general, people do seek responsiveness from their close relationship partners. In laboratory observations of participants discussing a personal problem with their romantic partners, the perceived stressfulness of the participant's problem predicted their seeking of emotional support from the partner, as measured by objective observers (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Reaction-time studies reveal automatic associations of stress-related concepts with proximity-related concepts, suggesting that people automatically bring close others to mind when confronted with stress (Mikulincer et al., 2000).

Desire for a responsive relationship ought to moderate such effects, because receiving responsiveness from partners is an important means by which people build intimate, close relationships (see Path K in Figure 25.1). Such intimacy may be one motivator for seeking responsiveness (in addition to more tangible benefits). Indeed, feelings of intimacy and closeness do seem tied to one's own self-disclosure, especially disclosure of emotions (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Levesque, Steciuk, & Ledley, 2002). Self-disclosure is related to goals of creating intimacy in relationships (Sanderson & Evans, 2001), relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1981), and commitment (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Self-disclosure of

vulnerabilities, such as anxiety and fear, to friends is more likely when people chronically desire for their relationships to be mutually responsive (Clark & Finkel, 2005), and expression of emotion is especially likely to occur when people believe others are available to establish a close, communal bond (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2000) or when such a bond is already established (Clark & Taraban, 1991, study 2).

There is likely to be both a tendency for people to seek responsiveness from those with whom they feel close and a closeness-enhancing mechanism of seeking and then receiving responsiveness (see Reis & Shaver, 1988; for a review of bidirectional effects linking self-disclosure and liking, see Collins & Miller, 1994). Indeed, just as the prior research suggests that desire for closeness causes self-disclosure, experimentally manipulated self-disclosure also creates feelings of closeness (Aron et al., 1997). Some additional findings point to the relational benefits of seeking responsiveness. People who desire warmth and trustworthiness in their relationships seem to communicate such desires to their romantic partners, which seem to engender partners' self-regulatory efforts to become more warm and trustworthy (Overall et al., 2006), and perceiving partners to have positive communal qualities predicts temporal changes in partners' self-perceptions (Murray et al., 1996b). People who are willing to express negative emotions to others elicit help from those others, and have more intimate friendships and more intimacy in the strongest of their friendships (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008). Therefore, responsiveness seeking seems to derive from and further contribute to desires for mutually responsive relationships.

On the other side of this coin, individuals who prefer to avoid interpersonal dependence seem to refrain from support seeking. When people are uncomfortable with consciously admitting their dependence on others (but have unconscious dependency needs), they seem unlikely to seek support unless that seeking can be done indirectly or unless the support being sought is not obviously a form of support (Bornstein, 1998). Similarly, while discussing a personal problem with their romantic partners, people high in attachment avoidance, who generally avoid dependence on others, sought their partner's social support in rather subtle and indirect ways, including fidgeting, sulking, complaining, or hinting about a need for support (Collins & Feeney, 2000). Moreover, whereas a positive relationship was found between the stressfulness of one's problem and observed support-seeking behavior for low avoidance individuals, this effect was not found for high avoidance individuals. Indeed, some findings suggest that individuals high in avoidance seek less support when they are distressed (Simpson et al., 1992). Attachment avoidance is inversely related to self-reported reliance on partners during emotion-laden situations (La Guardia et al., 2000), self-reported willingness to

express emotions (Gross & John, 2003), self-reported self-disclosure (Collins et al., 2002; Collins & Read, 1990; Gillath et al., 2006; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991), self-reported support seeking (Florian, Mikulincer, & Bucholtz, 1995; Gillath et al.; Mikulincer & Florian, 1995), and interviewer-assessed self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, and reliance on others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Other indices of desire for mutually responsive relationships also seem to predict responsiveness seeking. Individuals high in relational-interdependent self-construal not only have a communal orientation (as reviewed earlier), but they tend to engage in more intimate self-disclosures (Cross et al., 2000, studies 1 and 3), which is a form of responsiveness seeking.

As depicted in Figure 25.1, confidence in a partner's responsiveness also ought to predict support seeking (Path L). When people are confident that a partner is responsive, they are more likely to accept the risks of revealing needs and vulnerabilities and seeking support. Concerns about seeking responsive support from others, such as fearing criticism, a tarnished reputation, incurring costs to others, or disrupting harmony may reduce responsiveness seeking. Such factors explain cultural differences in seeking social support (Taylor, Sherman, Kim, Jarcho, Takagi, & Dunagan, 2004). People who believe they do not have others to turn to for emotional or instrumental support are less likely to express their emotions (Deci et al., 2006; Gross & John, 2003). Similarly, people who believe that closeness is risky because it offers the potential of hurt tend to refrain from self-disclosure (Brunell et al., 2007). Likewise, people who see their friends as providing support are more likely to seek emotional support (Deci et al., 2006; Ognibene & Collins, 1998), and those who believe that partners care for their needs are willing to express vulnerabilities such as sadness and hurt (Lemay & Clark, 2008a). Moreover, people are more willing to discuss and seek support regarding their personal goals with their relationship partners when those partners behave in a supportive and responsive manner (Feeney, 2004). Even subliminal primes related to interpersonal acceptance predicted increased self-reported willingness to seek emotional support to cope with a stressful situation (Pierce & Lydon, 1998; see also Gillath et al., 2006) and willingness to self-disclose (Gillath et al.). Classic findings that people are sometimes unwilling to ask for help from physically attractive strangers also may be explained by concerns about the other's rejection as a result of needing help (i.e., appearing inadequate) (Nadler, Shapira, & Ben-Itzhak, 1982).

Again, some findings regarding individual differences reveal a similar pattern. When secure individuals experience romantic jealousy, they claim to directly confront and express their anger to their partners, which may be a means of seeking responsiveness and reassurance. In contrast,

anxiously attached individuals claim to suppress their anger (Mikulincer, 1998b; Sharpsteen & Kirkpatrick, 1997), claim to be unwilling to rely on their partners to help them regulate their emotions (La Guardia et al., 2000), and report reduced support seeking (Florian et al., 1995). Similarly, couples characterized by low trust in the other's responsiveness seem unwilling to express to their partners the rather negative attributions they make for their partner's behavior, perhaps as a means of avoiding confrontation (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001). People also reported expressing their anger to their relationship partners to the extent that they believed that their partners would respond in a positive manner (Lundgren & Rudawsky, 2000).

However, some contrary findings exist. In another study, individuals high in attachment anxiety claimed more daily self-disclosure and greater intimacy in daily interaction than individuals low in attachment anxiety, especially after conflict (Pietromonaco & Barrett, 1997; see also Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They reported greater reassurance seeking relative to individuals low in attachment anxiety (Shaver, Schachner, & Mikulincer, 2005), and greater emotional expressiveness and reliance on others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). They also seem to characterize themselves in negative ways to elicit compassion from others (Mikulincer, 1998a). Such unstable results are not surprising given that, as we discussed previously, high anxiety is related to a strong desire for close bonds (which would increase responsiveness seeking), as well as insecurity regarding others' responsiveness (which would decrease responsiveness seeking). Perhaps the combination of desiring close relationships but fearing that they do not have them causes them to withdraw from seeking responsiveness when social threat seems especially high, but to redouble their efforts to obtain others' support and reassurance in lower threat situations. In addition, because attachment anxiety is associated with both increased personal distress and doubts about others' responsiveness, a suppressor effect may occur; those who feel increased distress may be more likely to seek support to alleviate that distress, but those who doubt others' responsiveness may be less likely to seek support to alleviate their distress. This suggests a need for delineating under what conditions one versus the other effect predominates.

#### **Path M: Responsiveness and Well-being**

As shown in Figure 25.1, the receipt of responsiveness should reduce the partner's needs for responsiveness and increase the partner's well-being. Much evidence suggests that close, responsive relationships can contribute to one's physical and mental well-being (Reis et al., 2000). We review some recent findings.

In a laboratory study of caregiving processes that Collins and Feeney (2000) conducted, participants discussed a personal problem with their romantic partners. Their perceptions of their partner's supportiveness, the partner's supportiveness observed by objective observers, and the partner's reports of their own supportive behavior each predicted positive changes in mood relative to pre-interaction mood (see also Feeney, 2004). Research on capitalization suggests that partner's responsiveness to positive events also can have an impact on emotional well-being. For instance, those who believed that their close partners responded constructively (e.g., with enthusiasm) and refrained from destructive responses (e.g., quashing or ignoring the event) to their positive events reported greater positive affect and life satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004). The effect of perceived support on measures of psychological well-being has been replicated many times (e.g., Barry et al., 2007; Davila, Bradbury, Cohan, & Tochluk, 1997; Deci et al., 2006; McCaskill & Lakey, 2000). Receiving feedback that verifies existing aspects of self-definition also appears to have affective benefits. Not only does it predict feeling understood, but it predicts positive emotion (Campbell et al., 2006). More general indices of relatedness (i.e., a sense of connection with others) also predict variability in subjective well-being (Patrick et al., 2007; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006), as do measures of attachment anxiety and avoidance, both as a generalized model of self with others (Cozzarelli et al., 2000; Klohnen et al., 2005; La Guardia et al., 2000; Roberts, Gotlib, & Kassel, 1996) and in terms of relationship-specific models (Barry et al., 2007).

Receiving responsiveness also facilitates coping. Women undergoing an abortion experienced more subsequent positive adjustment and less subsequent distress to the extent that they perceived their relationship partners as responding supportively to their decision to have an abortion (Major, Zubek, Cooper, Cozzarelli, & Richards, 1997). Women with rheumatoid arthritis experienced more psychological well-being when they had supportive spouses (Manne & Zautra, 1989). Similarly, secure attachment is related to more effective coping with stressors such as having an abortion (Cozzarelli, Sumer, & Major, 1998) and international conflict (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993). Even subliminal presentations of concepts related to interpersonal acceptance orient people to cope with stress in a growth-oriented manner, whereas presentations of concepts related to rejection orient people to cope with stress in a self-denigrating manner (Pierce & Lydon, 1998). These effects also are evident in physiological studies. People with large social support networks exhibited faster cardiovascular recovery after a stressor relative to people with small social support networks (Roy, Steptoe, & Kirschbaum, 1998). Examination of salivary cortisol levels suggests that insecurely attached

individuals have greater physiological stress reactions relative to securely attached individuals (Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006). Moreover, insecurely attached individuals show increased cardiovascular reactivity to stressors relative to securely attached individuals (Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Even the individual differences we view as precipitating factors, such as attachment styles and self-esteem, may change as a result of having responsive partners. People who believed their romantic partner saw many virtues in them increased in their global self-esteem over time (Murray et al., 2000). Likewise, people who felt secure in regard to a specific partner's acceptance developed more secure global attachment models over time (Pierce & Lydon, 2001). Those who were viewed positively by their partners (i.e., possessing many positive communal attributes) decreased in their attachment anxiety over time (Murray et al., 1996b). Those who perceived the availability of social support developed more secure attachment orientations over time (Cozzarelli, Karafa, Collins, & Tagler, 2003). Some evidence even suggests intergenerational transmission of self-esteem via conditional regard. Mothers who perceived their own parents to have provided conditional regard had lower self-esteem and had daughters who perceived them to similarly provide conditional regard (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004).

The beneficial effects of partners' responsiveness extend to pursuit and achievement of goals. People with romantic partners who report being attentive and responsive to their needs report greater self-efficacy, greater pursuit of personal goals, and more confidence regarding achievement of those goals relative to those who had partners who claimed to be inattentive and unresponsive (Feeney, 2007, studies 1 and 2; see also Brunstein et al., 1996; Feeney, 2004). Laboratory components of this research corroborate these findings, suggesting that people with romantic partners who behave in a sensitive and responsive manner were more likely to openly discuss and plan goal pursuits relative to people with partners who did not behave in a sensitive and responsive manner (Feeney, 2007, studies 1 and 2). People with responsive partners also exhibit more independent functioning by paying less attention and being less accepting of their partner's ostensible efforts to intrusively provide unsolicited task assistance (Feeney, 2007, study 1). People also were more receptive to negative information after poor intellectual performance, information that could facilitate growth, when they visualized a close relationship partner (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005). Moreover, partner responsiveness predicts temporal increases in self-efficacy and goal pursuit, and even greater likelihood of achieving goals (Feeney, 2007, study 2). Perceiving partners as generally supportive (Ruvolo & Brennan, 1997) and as supportive of one's ideals (Drigotas,

Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999) predicts achievement of ideals over time. Just reminding individuals of a significant other increases their confidence, goal pursuit, and performance if the significant other is believed to have high expectations for their performance (Shah, 2003). Similarly, activating thoughts of secure attachment increases interest in exploring new activities (Green & Campbell, 2000). Individual differences in tendencies to perceive and depend on close partners' responsiveness, as reflected in attachment security, predict appetitive achievement and mastery goals. That is, secure individuals appear to focus on potential gains in achievement situations, whereas insecure individuals appear to focus on potential threats (Elliot & Reis, 2003). This may explain why chronically insecure individuals report less interest in exploratory activities (Green & Campbell).

A number of findings suggest that receiving responsiveness has implications for physical health. For instance, loneliness is a risk factor for morbidity and mortality. Effects of greater cumulative stress on organs and regulatory systems, as well as reduced efficiency of restorative mechanisms (e.g., sleep) may be pathways that explain such effects (Cacioppo et al., 2002; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). In addition, having diverse social networks seems to have a main effect on physical health, whereas perceiving social support seems to buffer effects of stress on health (Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Partners who care for one's welfare also may exert pressure to engage in health-promoting activities (Lewis & Butterfield, 2007; Tucker, 2002). Social bonds also may mediate effects of seemingly more intrapsychic variables. For instance, individuals with low self-esteem experienced poorer quality social bonds (e.g., low satisfaction, doubts about acceptance, discomfort with closeness, general interpersonal stress), which, in turn, explained their greater health problems (Stinson et al., 2008).

Not all findings, however, are consistent with the view that receiving responsiveness enhances well-being. For instance, in a daily diary study of law students preparing to take the bar exam (Bolger et al., 2000), perceiving that partners provided social support predicted increased depression the following day, whereas partners' reports of providing support predicted reduced depression. (The former finding, but not the latter finding, also was significant for anxiety.) These authors argued that receiving "invisible support"—support that is provided but not detected—is more supportive than receiving visible support because the knowledge that one has been supported threatens self-esteem and self-efficacy. These findings do not fit well with the findings of support provision described earlier. It is possible that the measure of support receipt—that is, whether the partner "listened to and comforted" one—was

confounded with severity or nature of stress subjectively experienced on that day. In addition, law students preparing to take the bar exam may be a group under extraordinary ego threat, such that they easily feel threatened by needing support. Recent experimental work suggests that visible support increases distress relative to no support only to the extent that it is seen as communicating doubts about one's efficacy, and that invisible support decreases distress relative to no support to the extent that it provides reassurance regarding one's efficacy (Bolger & Amarel, 2007). These results suggest that visible support that includes bolstering feelings of efficacy may not have a detrimental effect. The research described previously suggests that promotion of self-efficacy, rather than visibility, is the critical issue, because visible, nonintrusive support that included encouragement seemed to enhance recipients' emotional well-being (e.g., Feeney, 2004, 2007). Moreover, whether social support increases negative affect seems to vary across individuals (Gleason et al., 2008). Perhaps it occurs primarily for individuals whose egos are easily threatened, and primarily with the support is related to something central to one's identity. A law student may feel threatened when receiving visible support for something on which he or she is supposed to have expertise. In contrast, a friend, very visibly, helping one to carry boxes into one's apartment ought not be threatening. Fitting with this reasoning, some research suggests that securely attached individuals seem more emotionally calm when their partners provided emotional support relative to insecure individuals, and that avoidant individuals tend to prefer instrumental (i.e., task-focused) support (Simpson, Winterheld, Rholes, & Orina, 2007).

Providing responsiveness to partners also may enhance one's own well-being. For instance, daily provision of support to romantic partners not only predicted partners' relationship satisfaction, but it also predicted one's own relationship satisfaction (Iida et al., 2008). Both daily giving and daily receiving support combined to predict lowest levels of negative mood and highest levels of closeness (Gleason, Iida, Bolger, & Shrout, 2003; Gleason et al., 2008). Giving support to and receiving support from a friend independently predicted relationship satisfaction, closeness, positive emotion, and feelings of attachment security (Brunstein et al., 1996; Deci et al., 2006). Experimental manipulations corroborate these findings, suggesting that people experience more positive mood and self-evaluations after helping (Williamson & Clark, 1989). Effects occurred primarily when participants believed the other was open to forming a close relationship, suggesting that some of the effect of helping on mood and self-evaluation is mediated by beliefs about promoting close relationships (for a review, see Clark & Grote, 1998).

## SUMMARY

This chapter defines close relationships as those that are characterized by the giving and receipt of responsiveness to a partner, with responsiveness itself defined as thoughts, feelings, and especially behaviors geared toward promoting the partner's welfare through understanding, validating, and caring for that partner (cf. Reis & Shaver, 1988). Responsiveness in its many forms, as it inheres in specific relationships, is the key to people feeling close and connected to other people and, in turn, to their mental and physical well-being.

Responsiveness itself takes many forms, and in most adult close relationships, responsiveness is mutual involving both the provision of support to partners and the receipt of support from partners. Ideally, both the giving and receiving of responsiveness is noncontingent, with the giving of responsiveness prompted by opportunities to promote partner welfare, and the seeking and acceptance of responsiveness prompted by opportunities for the partner to promote one's own welfare. When responsiveness is noncontingently given, partners can infer that they and their partners care for one another, and they can feel secure. It is also ideal for individuals in such relationships to be able to flexibly move their interpersonal goals and relational focus of attention to focus on partners when partners need support, to self when the self needs support, and to mutual activities when engaging in such activities that will benefit both relationship partners (cf. Clark et al., 2008).

Research abounds that people desire close, responsive relationships. Yet, "pulling off" a responsive, noncontingent, communal relationship is not easy. Recent research, especially that generated by attachment theory (cf. Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and that associated with a model of risk regulation in relationships (cf. Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006, and a forthcoming book by Murray & Holmes, 1999), but much other research as well suggests that worries about being dependent, vulnerable, and neglected or even abused by a partner or potential partner can interfere with the establishment of a close, responsive relationship by kicking self-protective motives into gear. This means, sadly, that a desire for such a relationship and the implicit knowledge of the value of such relationships is not sufficient to lead one to successful close relationships. If there is one lesson to be learned from recent research in this area, it is that trust in the likelihood that one's partner will care about one is absolutely crucial to being able to un-self-consciously pull off these relationships. Anything that threatens such trust, be it past experiences and the models of relationships that one brings to new relationships, poor partner behavior, or the interaction of these factors, often twists the process in relationships desired to be close, responsive relationships

in undesirable ways. Low trust and confidence in partner care can simply halt the giving and receiving of responsiveness. It can prompt self-defensive attacks on partners (cf. Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). It can lead to unrealistically positive or negative views of partners (cf. Graham & Clark, 2006), which, itself, can interfere with effective giving and receipt of support. It can lead individuals to abandon noncontingent care in favor of safer, more self-protective ways of interacting such as following or attempting to follow an exchange norm (cf. Grote & Clark, 2001; Murray et al., 2009), or it can lead to providing more responsiveness to one's partner than one expects for the self in the hopes of keeping the relationship (cf. Murray et al., 2009). Ironically, such reactions can perpetuate feelings of insecurity through projection processes (Lemay & Clark, 2008a) or through providing external attributions for partners' expressions of affection and positive regard (Lemay & Clark, 2008b).

On a happier note, high desire for responsive relationships combined with reasonably high trust in partners and, eventually, commitment to these relationships promotes these relationships and can buffer people from the normal ups and downs that our own imperfections and those of our partners present to us. For instance, high desire can lead us to perceive partners as more responsive than they might actually be (cf. Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008a), and high trust and commitment is associated with viewing partners as having more positive traits than they themselves or outsiders to the relationship consider them to have, which, in turn, can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies (cf. Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b) or sculpting partners into who they wish to be (Drigotas et al., 1999) and to processes such as seeing one's relationship as better than others' relationships (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschurt, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000), derogating the attractiveness of alternative partners (Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990), and even seeing positives in partners' faults (Murray & Holmes, 1999), together with other processes such as forgiveness, accommodation, and sacrifice, all of which may protect the present relationship by buffering it from the normal ups and downs of relationship life.

Not long ago, researchers spoke of the "greening" of the field of close relationship work (Berscheid, 1999). It is fair to say that the field has now blossomed. The field is well populated, current research programs are leading to new discoveries daily, and a nicely converging view of the intrapersonal and interpersonal processes that characterize optimal and sub-optimal relationships is emerging. At the same time, some topics and issues in this field have hardly been touched. Much of our research has focused on heterosexual romantic dating relationships and marriages among relatively young individuals. More work is needed on close relationships

among family members, friendships, same-sex relationships, be they romantic or not, and relationships among quite young, middle-aged, and elderly people. Little is known about how people negotiate the initiation phase of relationships, that is, how they get from initial attraction to a committed, ongoing relationship, or about how they manage entire networks of responsive relationships balancing responsibilities in each against responsibilities in others and choosing whom to depend upon for what. Work also is needed on how people decide what partners need and deserve. Ties between the research social psychologists do on normative samples of relationships and that done by clinicians dealing with couples in distress ought to be better integrated. Importantly, explorations of the implications of variations in relationship context for understanding social phenomena long of interest to social psychologists have barely begun despite signs those implications will be profound (Reis & Collins, 2004). Yet, with the rate of progress in this field of research and the number of interesting issues yet to be explored but under discussion, little doubt remains that the next *Handbook* chapter on close relationships will look very different from this one.

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### 930 Close Relationships

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## 936 Close Relationships

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## 938 Close Relationships

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