In our clinical work, we see people from all walks of life who talk about feelings of loneliness. For some clients, the conversation focuses on longing for loved ones “back home,” along with concerns about finding good friends in a new place. For too many, the loneliness and a sense of alienation stem from relationships that have soured. There are sons who do not feel connected to their fathers, boyfriends who feel invisible to their partners, wives who “don’t know” their husbands anymore, and aging parents who haven’t seen their children in years. All these people tell painful stories of loss. When our basic needs for love, affection, and belongingness are not met (Maslow, 1970; see Figure 13.1), we feel lonely and worthless. This pain has long-term effects because our growth is stymied when we feel detached and unloved.

We start our discussion of attachment, love, and flourishing relationships with comments on loneliness because much of the positive psychology of social connection was built on scholarship pertaining to traumatic separation (Bowlby, 1969) and failed relationships (Carrere & Gottman, 1999). Only recently have scholars pursued research questions such as, “What are the characteristics of successful relationships?” (e.g., Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003; Harvey, Pauwels, & Zicklund, 2001).

Attachment and love are necessary components of flourishing relationships, but they are not sufficient for the maintenance of such relationships. In this regard, attachment and love must be accompanied by what we refer to as purposeful positive relationship behaviors.

In this chapter, we discuss the infant-to-caregiver attachment that forms the foundation for future relationships, the adult attachment security that is closely linked to healthy relationship development, the love that is often considered a marker of quality of relationships, and the purposeful positive
relationship behaviors that sustain interpersonal connections over time and contribute to flourishing relationships. Along the way, we describe a hierarchy of social needs that demonstrates how meaningful relationships develop into flourishing relationships. We also describe real-life exemplars of “person-growing” relationships (relationships that promote the optimal functioning of both participants). Moreover, we discuss people who have experienced the best aspects of the interpersonal world. Finally, we summarize the findings on the biology of social support.

Infant Attachment

Attachment is a process that probably starts during the first moment of an infant’s life. It is the emotional link that forms between a child and a caregiver, and it physically binds people together over time (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1992). John Bowlby (1969), a clinician who worked with delinquent and orphaned children, identified numerous maladaptive parental behaviors (chaotic, unplanned attempts to meet a child’s needs) and adaptive parental behaviors (responsiveness to a child’s behavioral cues, e.g., smiling) that were believed to be causally linked to functional behavior and emotional experiences of children. For example, inconsistency in responses to children is associated with children’s frustration and later anxiety. On the other hand, consistency in caregivers’ responses to children’s cues is linked to children’s contentment and later development of trust. Adaptive and maladaptive parental behaviors lead to the development of an attachment system that regulates the proximity-seeking behaviors connecting infants and caregivers in physical and emotional space. This two-way connection has been described as “a unique, evolutionarily-based motivational system (i.e., independent of the gratification of libidinal needs and drives) whose

![Figure 13.1](image)

The Fulfillment of Needs for Love and Belongingness Is Considered a Prerequisite for Esteem and Self-Actualization
primary function is the provision of protection and emotional security” (Lopez, 2003, p. 286).

Through the study of children who became disconnected from their caregivers, Bowlby (1969) realized that insecure attachment is a precursor to numerous developmental struggles. A child with insecure attachment to a caregiver may have difficulty in cooperating with others and in regulating moods. These problems make existing relationships fragile and new relationships hard to build. Conversely, children with sound attachment systems become more appealing to their caregivers and other people. Over time, that attachment system becomes more sophisticated, and mutually beneficial patterns of interaction facilitate the psychological development of such children and their caregivers.

A classic behavioral assessment strategy designed by Mary Ainsworth (1979) has allowed psychologists to look into the attachment phenomenon. In the Strange Situation assessment, a child is exposed to a novel situation in the company of his or her caregiver, and then the caregiver is removed and reintroduced to the situation twice. During this process, the child participant’s reactions are assessed. Here are the basic steps in the assessment paradigm (Steps 2 through 7 last 3 minutes each):

1. Caregiver and child are invited into a novel room.
2. Caregiver and child are left alone. Child is free to explore.
3. Stranger enters, sits down, talks to caregiver, and then tries to engage child in play.
4. Caregiver leaves. Stranger and child are alone.
5. Caregiver returns for the first reunion, and stranger leaves unobtrusively. Caregiver settles child, if necessary, and then withdraws to a chair in the room.
7. Stranger returns and tries to settle child, if necessary, and then withdraws to the chair.
8. Caregiver returns for the second reunion, and stranger leaves unobtrusively. Caregiver settles child and then withdraws to the chair.

Trained observers code behavioral responses in this strange situation and render one of the following assessments of the quality of the attachment: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-resistant/ambivalent. (See Table 13.1 for a description of adult attachment classification systems that have been refined over the years.) The secure attachment pattern is characterized by a balance between exploration of the environment and contact with the caregiver. As the strange situation unfolds, the child will engage in more proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behavior with the caregiver, exploring the environment only to return for comfort when necessary.
Table 13.1  Three Prominent Classification Systems of Adult Attachment Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main &amp; Goldwyn (1984, 1998)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure/Autonomous</td>
<td>Interviewee demonstrates coherent, collaborative discourse. Interviewee values attachment but seems objective regarding any particular event/relationship. Description and evaluation of attachment-related experiences are consistent, whether experiences are favorable or unfavorable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>Interview is not coherent, and interviewee is dismissing of attachment-related experiences and relationships. Interviewee “normalizes” these experiences with generalized representations of history unsupported or actively contradicted by episodes recounted. Transcripts also tend to be excessively brief, violating the maxim of quantity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>Interview is not coherent, and interviewee is preoccupied with or by past attachment relationships/experiences. Interviewee appears angry, passive, or fearful, and uses sentences that are often long, grammatically entangled, or filled with vague uses. Transcripts are often excessively long, violating the maxim of quantity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved/Disorganized</td>
<td>During discussions of loss or abuse, interviewee shows striking lapse in the monitoring of reasoning or discourse. For example, the person may briefly indicate a belief that a dead person is still alive in the physical sense, or that this person was killed by a childhood thought. Interviewee may lapse into prolonged silence or eulogistic speech.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazan &amp; Shaver (1987)</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don’t often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others; I find it difficult to trust them completely, difficult to allow myself to depend on them. I am nervous when anyone gets too close, and often love partners want me to be more intimate than I feel comfortable being.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me or won’t want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Insecure patterns involve increasing tension between the child and parent over the course of the strange situation. Children with insecure-avoidant patterns avoid the caregiver when he or she is reintroduced into the situation, and those with the insecure-resistant/ambivalent pattern passively or actively demonstrate hostility toward the caregiver while simultaneously wanting to be held and comforted. (In the following Personal Mini-Experiments, conduct the jungle gym observation to test your ability to evaluate attachment in relationships.)

Quality of attachment patterns, as measured by the Strange Situation assessment approach, has predicted aspects of children’s functioning many years later. For example, a study of preschool children indicated that those who were securely attached were more able to cope with parental absence and to relate to actual strangers more readily. Insecurely attached children seem tongue-tied when communicating with adults, and they had general difficulty relating to their caregivers (Bretherton & Waters, 1985). Other researchers (e.g., Belsky & Nezworski, 1988) have identified long-term consequences of insecure attachment, such as relationship problems, emotional disorders, and conduct problems.
Personal Mini-Experiments

In Search of Love and Flourishing Relationships

In this chapter, we discuss attachment, love, and flourishing relationships. Our review suggests that sound relationships are built on a foundation of secure attachments and that they are maintained with love and purposeful positive relationship behaviors. Here are a few ideas for personal experiments aimed at helping you develop a better understanding of secure, loving relationships—including your own.

The Jungle Gym Observations of Attachment: Conduct your own Strange Situation (Ainsworth, 1979) observations at a jungle gym at the local playground. As a child begins to play and is separated from the caregiver by physical distance, note the frequency of proximity-seeking and contact-maintaining behavior by that child. Hypothesize how the child will react when he or she takes a break from playing . . . or when the caregiver roams a little farther away from the jungle gym (to supervise another child or find a bench). Note whether the child's behavior is consistent with your attachment-related hypotheses.

The Relationship of Two Circles: According to self-expansion theorists (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), a relationship between two people can be evaluated based on the degree of overlap of two circles representing the two persons in the relationship. To consider the degree of expansion and inclusion in your relationship (the less the two circles overlap, the less inclusion; the more they overlap, the more inclusion), draw a circle that represents your partner, and then draw a circle that represents you and your relationship to your partner. Consider the meaningfulness of the degree of overlap (inclusion and self-expansion) by discussing it with your partner.

Making the Most of Good News: Over the course of your relationship, you may become a master of capitalizing by providing active/constructive responses (see Figure 13.2, page 316) to your partner's attempts to share positive events. To foster this purposeful positive relationship skill, do the following to make the most of the positive daily events in your romantic partner's life:

- Listen actively and empathically to the account of the positive event.
- Mirror your partner's enthusiasm about the positive event (while he/she shares it with you) by engaging in authentic expressions of excitement and delight (e.g., smiling, saying “Great!” or “Wow!”, reaching for your partner’s hand).
- Ask two constructive questions about the positive event (“How did you feel when it happened?” “How did it happen? Tell me everything!” and other, more specific questions).
- Reintroduce the positive event into conversation later in the day or on the next day to stretch out the benefits of something good having happened in your partner's life.
Attachment is a dynamic force that connects children to their caregivers. Moreover, secure attachment provides the safe environment in which children can take chances, engage in learning activities, initiate new relationships, and grow into healthy, socially adept adults. In the following example, this secure attachment provided the springboard that helped “Crystal” to grow into a happy adult with a thriving family.

Crystal and her brother were always close. He saw her as a little baby who needed more attention, and as she grew up, she saw him as someone she could count on. Crystal warmly greeted her brother when he met her after school to walk her home. Since their early childhood, she has found comfort in her relationship with her older brother. Today, she is fond of telling her children stories about the many good times and occasional bad times she shared with her sibling.

Adult Attachment Security

Personal perspectives on attachment are carried through childhood and adolescence and into stages of adulthood in the form of an internal working model of self and others (Bowlby, 1988; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Early in their social development, children integrate perceptions of their social competence, appeal, and lovability (the self model) with their expectations regarding the accessibility, responsiveness, and consistency of caregivers (the other model). These models are relatively stable over developmental periods because they are self-reinforcing. That is, the internal models consist of a set of cognitive schema through which people see the world, gather information about self and others, and make interpersonal decisions. The model is a “conscious ‘mindful state’ of generalized expectations and preferences regarding relationship intimacy that guide participants’ information processing of relationship experiences as well as their behavioral response patterns” (Lopez, 2003, p. 289). If people carry forward a secure mindful state, they see the world as safe and others as reliable. Unfortunately, negative or insecure schema also may be perpetuated. For example, people who see the social world as unpredictable and other people as unreliable have difficulty overcoming their desires to keep others at a distance.

Numerous theorists (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Main & Goldwyn, 1984, 1998) have extended attachment theory across the life span in an effort to understand how adults relate to other adults as well as to the children for whom they will serve as caregivers. Developmental psychologists Mary Main and colleagues have conducted interviews of mothers who participated in the Strange Situation assessment, and found that adult attachment could best be described by a four-category system comprising secure'autonomous,
dismissing, preoccupied, and unresolved/disorganized. The interview used by Main (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Main & Goldwyn, 1984, 1998), the Adult Attachment Interview, has become the “gold standard” for clinical assessment of adult attachment. (Social psychologists researching attachment tend to use self-report measures such as those reviewed by Brennan, Clark, and Shaver in 1998.)

Social psychologists Cindy Hazan and Phillip Shaver have studied attachment in the context of adult romantic relationships. They found (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) that the three categories of secure, avoidant, and anxious, akin to Ainsworth’s (1979) groups, effectively described the nature of adult attachments to a significant other. In 1991, Bartholomew and Horowitz expanded the three categories of adult attachment to four categories by differentiating two types of avoidant attachment, dismissive and fearful. Most recently, Brennan et al. (1998) considered Bartholomew and Horowitz’s system from a different perspective. They conceptualized attachment on the two dimensions of attachment-related avoidance and attachment-related anxiety. The secure style is low on both dimensions, the dismissing style is high on avoidance and low on anxiety, the preoccupied style is low on avoidance and high on anxiety, and the fearful style is high on both avoidance and attachment anxiety. Table 13.1 on pages 300–301 describes the adult attachment classification systems.

Secure adult attachment, as characterized by low attachment-related avoidance and anxiety, involves a comfort with emotional closeness and a general lack of concern about being abandoned by others. Feeling secure in one’s attachment to other significant adults has numerous benefits. Most importantly, this approach provides the pathways to survival and healthy development. By successfully recruiting care from significant others, children and adults become stronger and more able to cope with threats (Bowlby, 1988). Moreover, by pursuing growth experiences within the context of safe, secure relationships, we can pursue optimal human functioning or flourishing (Lopez & Brennan, 2000).

Adult attachment security provided “Kelly,” in our next example, with a lively confidence that helped her initiate new relationships and sustain existing ones. Kelly introduced herself to her new group of colleagues by sharing a few interesting facts about her life. She had a close family hundreds of miles away and a boyfriend a thousand miles away. Despite her recent goodbyes, she seemed to have a great deal of emotional energy to give to her new friendships. Her first week on the job included three lunch dates with coworkers and numerous quick cell phone calls from Mom and her boyfriend.

Each of you have developed and maintained an attachment system, and based on our history and system, we process new social and emotional stimuli everyday. It determines who is or is not “let in” emotionally. Furthermore, it determines the depths of love.
The capacity for love is a central component of all human societies. Love in all its manifestations, whether for children, parents, friends, or romantic partners, gives depth to human relationships. Specifically, love brings people closer to each other physically and emotionally. When experienced intensely, it makes people think expansively about themselves and the world.

The definitive history of love (Singer, 1984a, 1984b, 1987) highlights the following four traditions, denoted by Greek terms, that define this primary emotional experience: (1) eros, the search for the beautiful; (2) philia, the affection in friendship; (3) nomos, submission and obedience to the divine; and (4) agape, or the bestowal of love by the divine. Contrary to the arguments of some researchers (Cho & Cross, 1995; Hatfield & Rapson, 1996) and contrary to the depictions of history in Hollywood movies, it is notable that Singer did not believe that romantic love played a major role in world culture.

Other notable scholars such as Texas Tech University psychologists Susan Hendrick and Clyde Hendrick (1992) hypothesized that only during the last 300 years or so have cultural forces led people to develop a sense of self that was capable of loving and caring for a romantic partner over a lifetime. Despite the uncertainty about the place of romantic love in history, its role in the future of the world is clear. Indeed, love for a companion is considered central to a life well lived, as described in this quotation: “Romantic love may not be essential in life, but it may be essential to joy. Life without love would be for many people like a black-and-white movie—full of events and activities but without the color that gives vibrancy and provides a sense of celebration” (Hendrick & Hendrick, p. 117).

Given what now can be described as a universal interest in romantic love, we highlight some of the psychological research that explores this type of loving. We describe three conceptualizations of romantic love that may foster an understanding of how it develops between two people.

**PASSIONATE AND COMPANIONATE ASPECTS OF ROMANTIC LOVE**

Romantic love is a complex emotion that may be best parsed into passionate and companionate forms (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Hatfield, 1988), both of which are valued by most people. **Passionate love** (the intense arousal that fuels a romantic union) involves a state of absorption between two people that often is accompanied by moods ranging from ecstasy to anguish. **Companionate love** (the soothing, steady warmth that
sustains a relationship) is manifested in a strong bond and an intertwining of lives that brings about feelings of comfort and peace. These two forms can occur simultaneously or intermittently rather than sequentially (from passionate to companionate).

Romantic love is characterized by intense arousal and warm affection. In a study of college students who were probably in the early stages of romantic relationships, nearly half named their romantic partners when asked to identify their closest friend (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993). This latter finding suggests that passionate and companionate love can coexist in the new relationships of young people. Likewise, in a study of couples married for as long as 40 years, Contreras, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1996) found that companionate love and passionate love were alive, and that passionate love was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction (of all variables measured in the study).

**THE TRIANGULAR THEORY OF LOVE**

In developing the triangular theory of love, psychologist Robert Sternberg (1986) theorized that love is a mix of three components: (1) passion, or physical attractiveness and romantic drives; (2) intimacy, or feelings of closeness and connectedness, and (3) commitment, involving the decision to initiate and sustain a relationship. Various combinations of these three components yield eight forms of love. For example, intimacy and passion combined produce romantic love, whereas intimacy and commitment together constitute companionate love. Consummate love, the most durable type, is manifested when all three components (passion, intimacy, commitment) are present at high levels and in balance across both partners.

Some of the research exploring Sternberg’s theory of love has focused on the predictive value of these three ingredients of love. In a study of 104 couples (average length of marriage was 13 years, ranging from 2 months to 45 years), both husbands’ and wives’ intimacy, followed by passion, predicted marital satisfaction (Silberman, 1995). Additionally, research on adults’ views about their relationships found that commitment was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction, especially for the long-term partnerships (Acker & Davis, 1992).

**THE SELF-EXPANSION THEORY OF ROMANTIC LOVE**

Informed by Eastern conceptualizations of love, Arthur Aron and Elaine Aron (1986) developed a theory that humans have a basic motivation to expand the self; moreover, they posited that the emotions, cognitions, and
behaviors of love fuel such self-expansion. People seek to expand themselves through love: “The idea is that the self expands toward knowing or becoming that which includes everything and everyone, the Self. The steps along the way are ones of including one person or thing, then another, then still another” (Aron & Aron, 1996, pp. 45–46).

According to the self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1996), relationship satisfaction is a natural by-product of self-expansive love. Being in a loving relationship makes people feel good. They then associate those positive feelings with the relationship, thereby reinforcing their commitment to the relationship. The positive consequences of being in love are clear. Aron, Paris, and Aron (1995) studied a group of college students over a 10-week period, and the researchers monitored the reactions of the students to falling in love (if they happened to do so during that particular semester). Those students who fell in love experienced increased self-esteem and self-efficacy. On a more cognitive level, self-expansion means that each partner has made a decision to include another in his or her self. This investment in each other adds to relationship satisfaction. (In the Personal Mini-Experiments, conduct the Relationship of Two Circles experiment to determine the extent to which love has been a self-expanding force in your life.)

COMMENTS ON LOVE RESEARCH

Psychological theories of love—and, more specifically, scholarly ideas about romantic love—provide insights into a mysterious phenomenon. The work of positive psychologists interested in love tells the story of how people first unite and then how positive feelings help to maintain relationships over time. We now turn to another example, the marriage of “Bill” and “Libby,” which has taught many people about the potency of love. Each afternoon, Bill and Libby can be seen walking their yellow Labrador retriever in their neighborhood. They chat nonstop about their days at work and about their dreams for the future. They are both near 60, but they have the look of high school friends excitingly planning their lives. Over dinner with friends, they flirt with each other, make occasional overtures, and tell funny stories about themselves and their relationship. When they are at their best, and the relationship is really going well, they make you think that their love will last forever.

The scholarship on love also describes stories of love (Sternberg, 1998) and the meaning of “I love you” (Hecht, Marston, & Larkey, 1994; Marston, Hecht, & Robers, 1987). Our stories of love develop throughout our lives and are carried by us into relationships; theoretically, these stories define the quality of our interactions with our significant others. Sternberg, upon interviewing a large sample of couples, found that there are at least 26 “love stories” (e.g., a fantasy story, a horror story) that are largely unconscious views of romance and relationships that guide our
interpersonal choices. By becoming more aware of the stories of love we have told ourselves over the years, we are more able to make mindful choices in approaching and enhancing relationships.

Analysis of the meaning of the statement, “I love you” (Hecht et al., 1994; Marston et al., 1987) reminds us how subjective and personal our views of love can be. Have you ever thought about what you mean when you say, “I love you”? Most people have not examined the many meanings of “I love you,” and that spurred Dan Cox, a student in my (SJL’s) positive psychology seminar, to ask his colleagues to describe exactly what they meant when they last said, “I love you” to someone. The many meanings of this sentiment included “I understand,” “I support you,” “Thanks,” “I am sorry” and more global statements, such as “This is a good life” and “It is good to be with you.” The variability in the meaning of those three little words suggests there is much we don’t know about the emotion that connects us to others.

Research on love does not account for all the subjectivity that defines the richness of the experience, nor does it identify the many reasons why some relationships fail and why some flourish. The next section highlights the behaviors, rather than positive emotions, that determine the success of most close relationships.

**Flourishing Relationships: A Series of Purposeful Positive Relationship Behaviors**

Positive psychologists specializing in close relationships (Harvey et al., 2001; Reis & Gable, 2003) are exploring what makes existing relationships flourish and what skills can be taught directly to partners to enhance their interpersonal connections. (Try to develop some of these behaviors by completing the brief exercises in the Life Enhancement Strategies.) In this section, we discuss theories and research evidence on flourishing relationships, which are good relationships that continue to get better due to concerted effort of both partners.

**BUILDING A MINDFUL RELATIONSHIP CONNECTION**

Well-minded relationships are healthy and long lasting. This belief led University of Iowa social psychologist John Harvey and his colleagues (Harvey & Ormarzu, 1997; Harvey et al., 2001) to develop a five-component model of minding relationships. This model shows how closeness, or the satisfaction and relationship behaviors that contribute to one another’s goals in life, may be enhanced. (See Table 13.2 for a summary of these components and their maladaptive counterparts.)
Life Enhancement Strategies

Additional tips for bringing more security and love into your life are listed here. Although we focus on aspects of romantic love in this chapter, we address many forms of love in this list of strategies.

Love
- Tell the story of your attachment history in a journal entry. Include the language of security/insecurity to describe your childhood and present-day experiences, and identify how your attachment history translates into your current ability to show love to friends, family, and significant others.
- When you are in an ongoing relationship, develop a list of what makes your partner feel appreciated, and attempt to enhance the culture of appreciation in your relationship with five purposeful acts each day.

Work
- Take a mindfulness meditation course (see Chapter 11 for a description) with a partner, and apply your newfound skills when attending to your own behavior and to the relationship. Generalize these skills to behavior with colleagues at work.
- Ignore old advice about making friends at work. Vital friendships (which may involve philial love) at the workplace can enhance your engagement with your work.

Play
- Children benefit socially and emotionally from having one caring adult in their lives. Volunteer some time with a child or youth service and attempt to form a connection with at least one young person. Over time, the benefits of the relationship may become increasingly mutual.
- Identify the couple in your life whom you believe has the best relationship. Arrange to spend some time with them so you can observe relationship behaviors that work for them. If you know the couple well, ask them specific questions about how they maintain their relationship.

Minding is the “reciprocal knowing process involving the nonstop, interrelated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of persons in a relationship” (Harvey et al., 2001, p. 424). As described in Chapter 11, mindfulness is a conscious process that requires moment-to-moment effort. This need for consciousness in minding relationships is reflected in the first component of the model, knowing and being known. According to the model, each partner in the relationship must want to know the other person’s hopes, dreams, fears, vulnerabilities, and uncertainties. Furthermore, each
partner must monitor the balance between his or her own self-expression and that of the partner, and give preference to learning about the other person rather than focusing on his or her own personal information. People who are successful at knowing and being known in their relationships demonstrate an understanding of how time brings about change, and of how change necessitates renewed opportunities and attempts to learn about the other person.

The second component of relationship minding involves partners making relationship-enhancing attributions for behaviors.Attributing positive behaviors to dispositional causes and negative behaviors to external, situational causes may be the most adaptive approach to making sense of another person's behavior. Over time, people in well-minded relationships develop the proper mixture of internal and external attributions and become more willing to reexamine attributions when explanations for a partner’s behavior don’t jibe with what is known about the loved one. Making charitable attributions (i.e., going beyond the benefit of the doubt; Thomas Krieshok, personal communication, June 21, 2005) occasionally can resolve conflicts before they become divisive.

Table 13.2   Minding Relationship Behavior: Adaptive and Nonadaptive Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive</th>
<th>Nonadaptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Via an in-depth knowing process, both partners in step in seeking to know and be known by the other.</td>
<td>One or both partners out of step in seeking to know and be known by the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners use the knowledge gained in enhancing relationship.</td>
<td>Knowledge gained in knowing process is not used or not used well (may be used to hurt other).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners accept what they learn and respect the other for the person they learn about.</td>
<td>Acceptance of what is learned is low, as is respect for the other person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners motivated to continue this process and do so indefinitely, such that synchrony and synergy of thought, feeling, and action emerge.</td>
<td>One or both partners are not motivated to engage in the overall minding process or do so sporadically; little synchrony and synergy emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both partners in time develop a sense of being special and appreciated in the relationship.</td>
<td>One or both partners fail to develop a sense of being special and appreciated in the relationship.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Accepting and respecting, the third component of the minding model, requires an empathic connection (see Chapter 12), along with refined social skills (such as those described in the next section). As partners become more intimate in their knowledge of one another and share some good and bad experiences, mindful acceptance of personal strengths and weaknesses is necessary for the continued development of the relationship. When this acceptance is linked with respect, it serves as an antidote for contemptuous behavior that can dissolve a relationship (Gottman, 1994).

The final components of the model are maintaining reciprocity and continuity in minding. Regarding reciprocity in minding, “each partner’s active participation and involvement in relationship-enhancing thoughts and behaviors” (Harvey et al., 2001, p. 428) is necessary for maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship. A lack of conscious engagement displayed by one partner can lead to frustration or contempt on the part of the other partner. Continuity in minding also may require planning and strategizing to become closer as the relationship matures. Partners who frequently check in on the other’s goals and needs are likely to identify what is working and what is not working in the minding process (see Snyder, 1994/2000).

Mindfulness is a skill that can be taught and, as such, relationship minding can be enhanced (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997). The mutual practice of mindfulness techniques (discussed in Chapter 11) could benefit partners who are attempting to apply Harvey’s relationship-enhancing guidance.

**CREATING A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION**

John Gottman (1994, 1999) has spent a lifetime “thin-slicing” relationship behavior (Gladwell, 2005). He measures bodily sensations of partners, “reads” the faces of husbands and wives as they interact, and watches people talk about difficult issues while he dissects every aspect of the exchange. He has become so good at his craft that he can use his analyses of brief interactions to predict relationship success (divorce versus continued marriage) with a 94% accuracy.

Gottman achieved this feat of prediction by studying thousands of married couples across many years of their relationships. (Although his original work focused on heterosexual married couples, Gottman’s lab’s website, www.johngottman.com, indicates that current studies focus on same-sex couples. The applicability of Gottman’s findings to people from diverse backgrounds currently is unclear.) The standard research protocol involves a husband and wife entering the “love lab” and engaging in a 15-minute conversation while being closely observed by the researchers and monitored by blood pressure cuffs, EKGs, and other devices. His seminal finding from observations of couples was derived with the assistance of mathematicians (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2003) who helped him discover what is referred to as
the “magic ratio” for marriages. Five positive interactions to one negative interaction (5:1) are needed to maintain a healthy relationship. As the ratio approaches 1:1, however, divorce is likely.

Achieving the 5:1 ratio in a relationship does not require avoiding all arguments. Partners in master marriages can talk about difficult subjects and do so by infusing warmth, affection, and humor into the conversation. On the other hand, a lack of positive interactions during challenging discussions can lead couples to emotional disconnections and to mild forms of contempt.

A Lot of Love in the Lovemaking: Avoiding Chaos, Relationshipwise

MARK D. FEFER

Professor John Gottman is the doctor of love, at least love of the conventional sort—he’s an internationally known researcher on what makes marriage last and what makes it fall apart. In his work at the University of Washington, he has managed to apply strict scientific rigor to what seems like the most subjective of areas, and he’s popularized his findings in a string of best-selling books (The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work is the most recent).

At his “love lab” near the UW, Dr. Gottman videotapes married couples as they go about a lazy day “at home” and monitors physiological signs like heart rate and blood pressure as they discuss areas of conflict. By toting up the “positive” and “negative” interactions, checking “repair attempts” during fights, watching for incidents of contemptuous behavior, etc., Gottman is able to predict the ultimate fate of the pair with over 90 percent accuracy, he says.

However, as a single guy, I wanted to know how I can keep from getting into a bad marriage in the first place. Wouldn’t that save us all a lot of trouble? Warm and affable, the professor met me at the Grateful Bread bakery near his home to discuss the issue.

Seattle Weekly: You study a lot of couples that are on the rocks. And you talk about the four behaviors that foretell divorce—criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling. But I’m sure that, at one time, most of these couples were in love and gushing about each other. How can I know if my current relationship is going to end up like that? Dr. Gottman: People used to think, “Well, you’re in love, you’re blissed out, you’re not going to be doing a lot of real nasty . . . not going to be contemptuous toward your partner, not going to be disrespectful.” Not true. If you keep going back and looking at relationships earlier and earlier, to the newlywed phase, the same variability [in behavior] exists for couples there as for later on. Even in the dating relationship—researchers have looked—the same signs are predictive. If you’ve been going together for 6 months, you can take a look at what’s going on and decide if you want to be in that relationship or not.
So how do I make that decision? How can I know if a relationship is right or not? First, what is the quality of the friendship? Are you guys really friends? In other words, is it easy to talk? Like, before you know it, four hours have gone by. It’s really a lot like same-sex friendship. It’s about being interested in one another, remembering stuff that’s important to one another, being affectionate and respectful, and it’s about noticing when your friend needs something from you.

Then there’s the quality of sex, romance, and passion. Do you feel special to this person? Do you feel attractive? Are you really attracted and turned on by them? Is there a lot of love in the lovemaking? Does it feel passionate?

But everybody feels this stuff at first, don’t they? That’s the surprising thing: People get married and they don’t really like each other, and they’re not having good sex together, and they don’t feel like their partner’s really that interested in them... they get married anyway! They’re not taking a hard look at their relationship.

OK, but so what if it’s really passionate at first—isn’t that going to fade? The common belief that passion and good sex start early and then fade is totally wrong—totally wrong. Passion can grow over time in a relationship if people pay attention to it. [In our studies of long-term couples] the thing that came out among those who had a great sex life was friendship—"We’ve remained really close friends, we’re really buddies, we try to understand and help each other."

What about fighting? From what you’ve written, it seems like fighting in itself isn’t bad, right? Right. Conflict does exist in the very beginnings of romantic relationships; it comes out. [But] what’s the balance in terms of destructive vs. constructive? Constructive conflict is about accepting influence from your partner, compromising. Destructive conflict is about insulting, being domineering, being defensive, denying any responsibility, withdrawing. Those predict a bad end to the relationship.

How do you get through a time when you’re feeling distant, or you’re not so sure about the relationship, or you’re arguing a lot? Can you repair effectively? It’s kind of a sense of confidence. You develop a feeling that you can weather any storm—not that you like the storms. Conflict is inevitable, but coping with it is a way of building the friendship.

Should I feel wildly in love, swept off my feet? You’d be surprised what a small percentage of relationships have had that. Psychologists have called it “limerance,” that stage. You’re mostly just projecting on your partner what you wish would be there. And when we started interviewing newlyweds about it, couples who had experienced it didn’t necessarily have better relationships. It didn’t seem necessary or sufficient, except that it is so pleasant to go through. It’s very good if you can build from there.

(Continued)
What else should I be on the watch for? There’s something called “negative sentiment override.” You tend to be walking around with a chip on your shoulder, hypervigilant for put-downs, for ways your partner is saying, “I don’t really love you, you’re not that special to me.” And if you’re in that state, it’s bad, particularly if you’re a male, because that’s something that is going to be very difficult to change. And it’s really just a question of perception. Two women may be identical in how angry they get, but the one guy is saying, “Boy, she’s really stressed right now, but it’s OK; I get that way myself sometimes.” The other guy’s saying, “Nobody talks to me like that; . . . this, who needs this. . . .” What determines the perception, we’ve discovered, is friendship. If you feel like your partner respects you, is interested in you, turns toward you, then you’re in positive sentiment override.

Why are we so bad at this? More than half of all marriages end in divorce. Are we just choosing badly? Are we just bad at being married like we’re bad drivers? There are lots of ways to destroy things, and usually only a few ways to really maintain things and keep them working. Things fall apart—this is the entropy idea. Chaos is the more likely event. It really takes a lot of energy to maintain a system that’s working well.


Drawing from his decades of research and his “sound marital house” theory, Gottman and colleagues (2002) developed a multidimensional therapeutic approach to couples counseling that moves partners from conflict to comfortable exchanges. The goals of the therapy include the enhancement of basic social skills and the development of an awareness of the interpersonal pitfalls associated with the relationship behaviors of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. Over time, these four behaviors that undermine relationships are replaced with complaint (i.e., a more civil form of expressing disapproval), a culture of appreciation, acceptance of responsibility for a part of the problem, and self-soothing. These skills also are mentioned in Gottman’s (1999) book, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.

Based on our reading of Gottman’s work, his advice regarding the creation of a culture of appreciation in a relationship may be his most basic, yet most potent, advice to couples of all ages, backgrounds, and marital statuses. The purposeful positive relationship behavior of creating a culture of appreciation is potentially powerful because of (1) the positive
reception of the partner and the partner’s behavior that it promotes, and (2) the contemptuous feelings that it prevents. Creating a culture of appreciation helps to establish an environment where positive interactions and a sense of security are the norms. Expressing gratitude (see Chapter 13) to a partner is the primary means for creating a positive culture. Saying thanks for the small behaviors that often go unnoticed (picking up around the house, taking the trash out, making the morning coffee, cleaning out the refrigerator) makes a partner feel valued for his or her daily efforts around the home. Sharing appreciation for small favors (taking an extra turn in the car pool, making a coworker feel welcome in the home) and for big sacrifices (remembering a least favorite in-law’s birthday, giving up “rainy day” money for a home expense) honors a partner’s contributions to the relationship and the family.

CAPITALIZING ON POSITIVE EVENTS

During most of the 20th century, research into relationships focused on negative, or *aversive*, processes such as resolving conflict and dysfunctional communication. Relationship research was grounded in the assumption that these processes are the primary determinants of relationship success. Harvey and Gottman have worked diligently to highlight the role of positive relationship behaviors that often have been overlooked. This focus on the positive, or *appetitive*, processes in relationships may be the primary reason that their theories and research findings are so robust. *Aversive processes* are the eliminating of negative relationship behaviors; *appetitive processes* are the promoting of positive relationship behaviors. Shelly Gable and Howard Reis (Gable & Reis, 2001; Gable et al., 2003; Reis & Gable, 2003) have demonstrated that these two processes are independent and that they must be conceptualized and researched as independent processes if we are to fully understand human relationships.

Gable et al. (2003) noted that differentiating between appetitive and aversive processes provides a new lens for viewing research on the success of close relationships. Now, in a program of research summarized in Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004), the researchers address the appetitive relationship processes directly by answering the question, “What do you do when things go right?” In a series of studies, Gable and colleagues found that the process of capitalization, or telling others about positive events in one’s life, is associated with personal benefits (enhanced positive affect and well-being) as well as interpersonal benefits (relationship satisfaction and intimacy). The personal gains are attributable to the process of reliving the positive experience, and they are enhanced when a partner responds enthusiastically (i.e., active/constructively; see Figure 13.2) to the
How would your friend/relative/partner characterize your habitual responses to their good news?

**Active/Constructive**
- My friend/relative/partner reacts to the positive event enthusiastically.
- My friend/relative/partner seems even more happy and excited than I am.
- My friend/relative/partner often asks a lot of questions and shows genuine concern about the good event.

**Passive/Constructive**
- My friend/relative/partner tries not to make a big deal out of it but is happy for me.
- My friend/relative/partner is usually silently supportive of the good things that occur to me.
- My friend/relative/partner says little, but I know he/she is happy for me.

**Active/Destructive**
- My friend/relative/partner often finds a problem with it.
- My friend/relative/partner reminds me that most good things have their bad aspects as well.
- My friend/relative/partner points out the potential down sides of the good event.

**Passive/Destructive**
- Sometimes I get the impression that my friend/relative/partner doesn’t care much.
- My friend/relative/partner doesn’t pay much attention to me.
- My friend/relative/partner often seems uninterested.

Figure 13.2  Capitalizing on Daily Positive Events


Note: Shelly Gable of UCLA divides the possible responses into the four categories described above. She has found that the first response style is central to capitalizing, or amplifying the pleasure of the good situation and contributing to an upward spiral of positive emotion.

good news. Improvement in interpersonal relations is contingent upon the quality of the partner’s response to the loved one’s good news. In Gable et al.’s research, active and constructive responses by partners were found to be the most beneficial.
Praise: Encouraging Signs

WILLOW LAWSON

Summary: Your partner’s level of encouragement is a good indicator of how your relationship is going.

Hurdles like jealousy and miscommunication can determine whether a relationship succeeds. But what about how couples “cope” when something positive happens? According to a new set of studies, the way we respond to our mate’s good fortune is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction and, at least in the short term, whether a couple will break up.

Shelly Gable, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles, examined how couples share everyday positive events because she felt that the lion’s share of relationship research focused on how couples handle conflict and trauma. “Thankfully, positive events happen more often than negative ones,” she says. “And satisfying and stable relationships are about more than a lack of conflict, insecurity, and jealousy.”

In one study, Gable analyzed how men and women respond to a positive event in their partner’s life, such as a promotion at work. A partner might respond enthusiastically (“That’s wonderful, and it’s because you’ve had so many good ideas in the past few months”). But he or she could instead respond in a less-than-enthusiastic manner (“Hmmm, that’s nice”), seem uninterested (“Did you see the score of the Yankees game?”) or point out the downsides (“I suppose it’s good news, but it wasn’t much of a raise”).

The only “correct” reaction according to Gable’s research—the response that’s correlated with intimacy, satisfaction, trust and continued commitment—is the first response, the enthusiastic, active one. Basking in good news or capitalizing on the event seems to increase the effect of happy tidings by reinforcing memory of the occurrence. This is true for both men and women, and holds regardless of whether they are dating or married and whether the positive event is large or small.

Gable says an occasional passive response from a partner probably isn’t the end of the world, and she speculates that most of us are able to make excuses for our partners in such situations. “The problem is when that’s the chronic response,” she says. “If a partner doesn’t respond actively and constructively, the person who’s trying to disclose something immediately feels less positive and feels less intimacy. Basically they feel less understood, validated, and cared for.”


The purposeful positive relationship behavior of capitalizing on positive events for intrapersonal benefits is straightforward. It merely involves telling trusted friends and family about your daily “good stuff.” If there are
people who attempt to undermine such excitement by pointing out the downside of a positive event (“That promotion will cause you to work harder and longer. Are you sure you are up for that? Really?”), then it is best to avoid telling them the good news. The habit of offering active, constructive responses (mirroring enthusiasm, asking meaningful questions about the event) to the good news of others also is easily developed (see the Personal Mini-Experiments, Making the Most of Good News). And, the more you model this capitalizing behavior, the more likely it is that your partner and other people in your circle of friends and family will reciprocate and practice it themselves.

Few couples master each and every purposeful positive relationship behavior described in this chapter, but some couples seem to dance effortlessly through each day. When you ask them, “How do you make your relationship work?” you get an answer that makes you realize how hard they work at it. In this regard, we turn to the example of “Mitch” and “Linda,” who tell the story of the work that goes into their flourishing relationship. “For as long as we have been married, I have sent Linda flowers every Friday,” Mitch reported. Linda chimed in that Mitch keeps up with her “new” favorite flowers and honors the tradition even when they are on vacation. “We have been in remote villages living among the locals, and that man will spend an entire Friday seeking out a bouquet of flowers.” Mitch expresses his appreciation for Linda through flowers, and Linda shares her gratitude by showering him with thanks and praise, as if it is the first time she had ever received such a gift.

The Neurobiology of Interpersonal Connection

Thus far, we have discussed the emotional and behavioral components of close relationships. Now, we turn to an emerging body of multidisciplinary scholarship that is devoted to explaining the neurobiological underpinnings of attachment and the prosocial emotions and behaviors that are the prerequisites for healthy adult relationships.

Neuropsychanalyst Allan Schore (1994, 2003) and health psychologist Shelley Taylor (Taylor, Dickerson, & Klein, 2002) have gathered and integrated indirect and direct evidence on the neurobiology of interpersonal connection from their own laboratories, as well as from other researchers. Schore, building on the assumptions of attachment theory, argues that the social environment, mediated by actions of and attachment to the primary caregiver, influences the evolution of structures in a child’s brain. More specifically, Schore proposed that the maturation of a region of the right cortex, the orbitofrontal cortex (which may store the internal working models of attachment), is influenced by interactions between the child and the caregiver. As the orbitofrontal cortex matures, self-regulation of emotions is enhanced. The brain–behavior interactions suggest that an upward
spiral of growth may explain how infant attachment sometimes produces emotionally healthy adults. That is, when a child and his caregiver have a secure attachment, the part of the brain that helps with the regulation of emotions and behavior is stimulated. As the child’s security is maintained, the brain development is promoted, and the abilities to empathize with others and to regulate intrapersonal and interpersonal stress are enhanced. Equipped with well-honed self-regulation skills, the child can develop and sustain healthy friendships and, eventually, healthy adult relationships. (For additional discussion of work related to the link between attachment and neurobiology, we suggest Siegel’s [1999] The Developing Mind.)

Taylor and colleagues (Taylor et al., 2002), intrigued by the health benefits of social contact and social support (see Seeman, 1996, for a review), reviewed research on social animals and humans to determine the biological mechanisms associated with interpersonal experiences. Like Schore (1994, 2003), Taylor et al. hypothesized that a nurturing relationship between a child and a caregiver promotes the development of regulatory activity, in this case in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) system (which is activated via hormone secretion). The same biological system may regulate adult social functioning, but little is known about how this system matures over the decades. It is becoming clearer, however, that gender differences in the way the neuroendocrine system works to transform social support into health benefits are associated with the presence of oxytocin in women.

Neuroscientists and psychologists will continue to explore how neurobiology and positive social behavior are intertwined. As the positive psychology of close relationships incorporates neurobiological findings, we will draw closer to knowing how good relationships become great.

More on Flourishing Relationships

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, infant-to-caregiver attachment and adult attachment security are linked to healthy relationship development. Given the literature revealing the neurobiological underpinnings of attachment (Schore, 1994; Taylor et al., 2002), it appears that interpersonal connection stimulates the brain activity that helps to create the regulatory systems that lead to the development of empathy, enjoyment of positive interactions, and management of the stress associated with negative interactions. The result of this complex brain–behavior interplay is the creation of a foundation of interpersonal experiences and skills on which future relationships are built (see Figure 13.3).

Love, the positive emotion that links us, often is considered a marker of the quality of relationships. We believe that the love we have for another motivates us to engage in purposeful positive relationship behaviors that sustain interpersonal connections over time. As relationships grow
stronger, they flourish and facilitate the personal development of both participants. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the life tasks of adults.)

Another look at Figure 13.3 reveals the makings of flourishing relationships and summarizes our comments in this section. The hierarchy of social needs presented in this figure suggests that attachment, love, and flourishing relationships are desired by all people but achieved only by some. Indeed, we believe that, of all the individuals who are attached to a caregiver at infancy, only some develop secure adult attachments. And, given that the stability of attachment style across the lifespan has been questioned (Feeney & Noller, 1996), those who experience attachment in early childhood may not necessarily be those who achieve secure attachment in adulthood.

Progressing up the hierarchy, the need for sustained romantic love is met by those who have realized at least a modicum of secure adult attachment. With the benefits generated by applying *purposeful positive relationship behaviors* (see arrow in Figure 13.3), a couple can parlay love into a flourishing relationship.

**Building a Positive Psychology of Close Relationships**

The study of insecure attachment, lost love, and failed relationships has produced significant findings that are relevant to our lives. Indeed, relationship researchers have been successful in uncovering what does not work and
have attempted to teach people how to correct their relationship problems. Nevertheless, most would agree that we all struggle with identifying the right things to do in relationships. The positive psychology of close relationships builds on the work of the past (including the knowledge that secure attachment and love are prerequisites for healthy relationships), incorporates a focus on appetitive processes, and sets an agenda for the future—an agenda that will produce research that will tell the story of flourishing relationships.

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**Key Terms**

**Adaptive parental behaviors**: Parents’ appropriate responsiveness to a child’s behavioral cues (i.e., smiling).

**Agape**: The bestowal of love by the divine.

**Appetitive processes**: The promotion of positive relationship behaviors.

**Attachment system**: The sum of emotional and physical proximity-seeking behaviors toward the caregiver, developed by the child as a result of adaptive and maladaptive parent behaviors. Regulates the pattern of attachment characteristic of the child.

**Aversive processes**: The eliminating of negative relationship behaviors.

**Companionate love**: A form of romantic love characterized by the soothing and steady warmth that sustains a relationship.

**Consummate love**: The most durable type of love, manifested when all three components (passion, intimacy, commitment) are present at high levels and in balance across both partners.

**Eros**: Romantic love, including the search for and possession of the beautiful.

**Flourishing relationship**: A good relationship that continues to get better due to the concerted effort of both partners.

**Insecure-avoidant attachment**: In the Strange Situation assessment, an attachment pattern characterized by a tension between the parent and child, resulting in the child’s avoidance of the parent when reintroduced.

**Insecure-resistant/ambivalent attachment**: In the Strange Situation assessment, an attachment pattern characterized by a tension between the parent and child, resulting in the child’s passive or active demonstration of hostility toward the caregiver while simultaneously wanting to be held and comforted.
Maladaptive parental behaviors: Parents’ chaotic or unplanned attempts to meet a child’s needs.

Minding: A form of relationship maintenance that includes knowing and being known, making relationship-enhancing attributions for behaviors, accepting and respecting, and maintaining reciprocity and continuity.

Nomos: A type of love characterized by submission and obedience to the divine.

Passionate love: A form of romantic love characterized by the intense arousal that fuels a romantic union.

Philia: A type of love characterized by affection and friendship.

Secure attachment: In the Strange Situation assessment, a form of attachment that involves a balance between exploration of the environment and contact with the caregiver.

Self-expansion theory of romantic love: A theory developed by Arthur and Elaine Aron suggesting that humans have a basic motivation to expand the self. The Arons hypothesize that the emotions, cognitions, and behaviors of love fuel such self-expansion.

Strange Situation: An assessment strategy first used by Mary Ainsworth to study children’s attachment styles. The strange situation exposes a child to a novel situation in the company of his or her caregiver; the caregiver is then removed and reintroduced to the situation twice while the researcher assess the child participant’s reactions.

Triangular theory of love: Robert Sternberg’s theory that all types of love are made up of different combinations of passion, intimacy, and commitment.
Part VI

Understanding and Changing Human Behavior