CHAPTER 11

Intimate Relationships across the Life Span

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In 1975, Senator Henry Proxmire took the floor of the Senate to denounce publicly the awarding of a research grant to Ellen Berscheid and Elaine Hatfield by the National Science Foundation for the study of passionate and companionate love. Proxmire denounced the project as a waste of time and money, arguing that there was no hope that the methods and tools of science could be fruitfully applied to the understanding of romantic relationships. Furthermore, he argued, there were some questions that Americans simply did not want the answers to, and among those were the mysteries of love (Hatfield, 2001).

Nearly 50 years later, it is clear that nothing could be further from the truth. The explosion of scientific research on romantic relationships since that time, along with the proliferation of popular advice books on the topic, demonstrates that there are few subjects in which the average American is *more* interested than the science of intimate relationships. For a relatively young field, relationship science has made remarkable progress in documenting the fundamental cognitive, affective, behavioral, and biological bases of intimate relationships. Yet although researchers have devoted increasing attention to the distinctive dynamics of romantic relationships during adolescence versus adulthood versus late life, few have adopted a life-span theoretical approach to intimate relationships. By this we mean an approach that seeks to understand trajectories of romantic relationship experience from adolescence to late life, emphasizing the developmental antecedents and

implications of different types of relationship experiences at different stages of life. In this chapter, we provide a comprehensive overview of current state-of-the-art research on intimate relationships, attempting to synthesize research findings within a broader life-span/developmental framework.

Toward this end, we begin by emphasizing three key premises, which we revisit throughout the review. First, *the individual's developmental status shapes the quality and functioning of his or her intimate relationships*. Through adolescence, emerging adulthood, middle adulthood, and late life, the individual's changing socioemotional capacities, goals, and motives influence the types of intimate relationships he or she desires (for example, serious vs. casual) as well as the functional properties of those relationships (for example, levels of intimacy, empathy, support, negotiation). Second, *intimate relationships shape social and psychological development*. Just as infant–caregiver relationships provide the foundation for the child's developing self-concept and interpersonal skills, intimate relationships from adolescence to late life promote continued maturation by eliciting a changing repertoire of developmentally specific tasks and abilities. As individuals strive, from relationship to relationship, to meet their own needs and those of their partners, they become increasingly adept at balancing a complex interplay of motives, goals, and skills. Hence, each successive experience is influenced by the individual's *current* developmental status (reflecting his or her cumulative developmental history up to that point) but also feeds forward to shape *future* development across multiple domains of psychological functioning.

Our third premise follows directly from the first two: Because intimate relationships represent both the "output" of prior psychosocial development and the "input" for the next stage of development, they necessarily exert *cumulative and dynamic* influences on mental and physical functioning over the life span. In essence, this amounts to a cascade model of relationships and development in which each of an individual's successive relationships exerts a lasting press on his or her entire trajectory of psychosocial development (although, of course, some relationships will prove more influential than others). In the ensuing review, we repeatedly reconsider whether certain types of romantic experiences—both positive and negative—have notably different implications depending on where they occur within an individual's entire relationship trajectory and the processes through which these trajectories change and stabilize over time. Our consideration of such questions is necessarily constrained by the lack of longitudinal data on sequential relationship experiences. Although a number of studies have charted the long-term course of single relationships (typically first-time marriages), researchers do not typically follow individuals as they move from relationship to relationship over long stretches of time, building skills, strengths, fears, and expectations along the way. Hence, at the moment a couple is captured within a "newlywed" sample or a study of marital conflict dynamics, we typically have little understanding of how each partner arrived at that point, and the distinctive developmental histories underlying his or her respective behaviors and cognitions. Given these gaps in the empirical literature, many of the developmental issues we address throughout this chapter take the form of questions rather than answers. By raising such questions, we hope to focus attention on some of the most important and productive avenues for future life-span/developmental research on intimate relationships.

BASIC QUESTIONS: LOVE AND PAIRBONDING

First, however, some conceptual clarifications are in order. Unlike studies of parent–child relationships or friendships, investigations of "intimate relationships" inevitably raise definitional quandaries. What exactly qualifies as an intimate relationship? Many researchers use this phrase to denote any and all romantic or sexual relationships, from one-night stands to 30-year marriages. In this framework, "intimate" simply refers to the element of sexual desire or behavior in the relationship. More commonly, however, intimate relationships are defined as relationships involving both emotional and physical intimacy, and these are the types of relationships which form the topic of this chapter. Although the ensuing review will focus on *social-psychological* investigations of intimate relationships, it bears noting that the past several decades have also seen increased attention to the *evolutionary* bases of these relationships—or *pairbonds*, as they are typically called—and to questions regarding the nature and origin of romantic love. Hence, a brief overview of this area provides a useful foundation for the review to follow.

Romantic love, as opposed to more general forms of love experienced for friends and family, has been defined in numerous ways by psychologists, but perhaps the most serviceable definition is that provided by Aron and Aron (1991): "the constellation of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions associated with a desire to enter or maintain a close relationship with a specific other person" (p. 26).

Notable in this definition is the *multifactorial* nature of love, involving "behaviors, cognitions, emotions," the *motivational* force of love (i.e., *desire* to enter or maintain a relationship), its focus on a *single target*, and, lastly, the absence of any mention of sexual desire. Historically, it was often assumed that sexual desire provided the motivational force behind love, but contemporary research clearly demonstrates that romantic love and sexual desire are governed by functionally independent social-behavioral systems that evolved for different reasons and that involve different neurochemical substrates (reviewed in Diamond, 2003).

The popular impression that romantic love necessarily involves sexual desire may be attributable to the fact that most individuals associate the notion of romantic love with a particular type of romantic love—*passionate love* (Hatfield, 1987; Hatfield, Schmitz, Cornelius, & Rapson, 1988). This form of love (or, more accurately, infatuation) typically characterizes the earliest stages of a developing romantic relationship and tends to be associated with extremely high levels of sexual desire, sexual activity, or both. In contrast, the form of love that endures long beyond this initial burst of passion, and that is characterized by deep feelings of mutual care and affection, has been denoted *companionate love.*

Among the most important revolutions in research on intimate relationships since the late 1980s has been the notion that adults' experiences of companionate love are governed by the same evolved social-behavioral system that governs infants' bonds to their caregivers: the attachment system. Accordingly, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1973a, 1973b, 1980, 1982), which began as a theory of infant–caregiver bonding, is now arguably the preeminent theoretical model of adult romantic pairbonding. We therefore take a brief digression into its core premises regarding the evolved biobehavioral dynamics of romantic love.

Attachment and Pairbonding

Evolutionary theorists have argued that in the environment in which humans evolved, highly vulnerable offspring were far more likely to survive if they had the care of both parents in the early years of life, introducing the evolutionary problem of how to keep reproductive partners together long enough to rear their offspring past the initial, most dangerous stage of development (Mellen, 1982). The social-behavioral system of *pairbonding*—in which reproductive partners are emotionally motivated to maintain an enduring close relationship with one another even after mating has occurred—is thought to have provided the solution.

Yet as Gould and Vrba (1982) argued, evolution does not generally result in the production of brand-new mechanisms when existing ones will suffice, and mammals already possessed a potent social-behavioral system for social bonding: *infant–caregiver attachment*. John Bowlby (1958, 1982) conceptualized attachment as an evolved behavioral system designed to regulate infants' proximity to caregivers and thereby maximize chances for survival. When an infant experiences distress, he or she immediately attempts to gain proximity to the attachment figure (by crying, clinging, etc.). In normative cases, this proximity reassures and soothes the infant, in which case he or she comes to associate the presence of the attachment figure with emotional security and distress alleviation. Even when the attachment figure is not consistently effective at alleviating distress, infants typically develop a unique, exclusive, emotionally primary relationship with the attachment figure, such that he or she becomes the preferred target for proximity and security seeking.

Although Bowlby developed attachment theory on the basis of observations of infant–caregiver behavior, he argued that the attachment system is operative across the entire life span (1988). Similarly, other evolutionary theorists have argued that once the "problem" of keeping human reproductive partners together emerged, the infant–caregiver attachment system was coopted for this purpose (Panksepp, 1998). Hence, adult pairbonding has been posited as an *exaptation*—a system that originally evolved for one reason but comes to serve another (Gould & Vrba, 1982). Support for the notion that adult romantic love is an adult version of infant–caregiver attachment comes from extensive research documenting that infant–caregiver attachment and adult pairbonding share the same core emotional and behavioral dynamics: heightened proximity maintenance, resistance to separation, and utilization of the partner as a preferred target for comfort and security seeking (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). Of course, a key difference between infant–caregiver attachment and adult romantic pairbonding concerns the presence of sexual desire and behavior in the latter (Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). Although the specific mechanisms through which sexuality becomes integrated into the adult attachment system has never been directly investigated, Hazan and Zeifman (1994) posited a critical role for physical intimacy in this regard. They observed that the same types of intimate physical contact which are reserved—among

children—for their parents (nuzzling, kissing, stroking, and sustained chest-to-chest cuddling) are reserved among adults for their romantic partners. Hence, one possibility is that as adolescents increasingly reappraise such forms of physical intimacy as reflecting erotic rather than caregiving motives (due to the hormonally triggered postpubertal surges in their own sexual motivation), this may provide a gateway through which sexual thoughts and feelings become progressively intertwined with the adult attachment system. It bears noting, however, that although pairbonds usually involve the integration of love and desire, this is not a necessary condition for their formation or maintenance (Diamond, 2003), reflecting the fact that the mechanisms underlying pairbonding evolved in the context of infant–caregiver attachment (for which sexual desire is irrelevant).

Even more powerful evidence for the links between attachment and pairbonding, and the distinctions between pairbonding and sexual desire, is provided by the growing body of research on the neurobiological substrates of these systems. Because most work in this area has been conducted with animals, we remain in the hypothesis-generation rather than hypothesis-testing stage with respect to humans; nonetheless, converging lines of evidence (reviewed by Diamond, 2003; Fisher, 1998) suggest that the marked experiential differences among sexual desire, infatuation, and attachment may be partially attributable to their distinct neurochemical signatures. Sexual desire, for example, is directly mediated by gonadal estrogens and androgens (reviewed in Wallen, 1995). Yet these hormones do not mediate the formation of affectional bonds. Rather, animal research indicates that the intense proximity maintenance and separation distress associated with attachment formation (from its passionate onset to its quieter, enduring fruition) are mediated by an array of interacting neurochemicals that undergird the fundamental reward circuitry of the mammalian brain, such as endogenous opioids, dopamine, corticosterone, oxytocin, and vasopressin (reviewed in Carter, 1998; Carter & Keverne, 2002; Curtis & Wang, 2003; Panksepp, 1998; Panksepp, Nelson, & Bekkedal, 1997).

One of the most important contributions of this growing body of evolutionary, biobehavioral research on adult attachment formation is that it demonstrates the value of a thoroughgoing life-span/developmental approach to studying intimate relationships. In connecting the dynamics of adult romantic love to the dynamics of our earliest emotional bonds to caregivers, attachment-based perspectives on intimate relationships provide a uniquely generative framework for modeling the normative development of these bonds over the life span. Attachment theory also provides a powerful life-span/developmental framework for understanding the emergence and expression of individual differences in the quality of intimate relationships, and this is the topic to which we turn next.

Individual Differences in Attachment Style

When Hazan and Shaver argued in their seminal 1987 article that adult romantic relationships were, in essence, adult versions of infant–caregiver attachments, they maintained that the basic developmental continuity in the functioning of the attachment system extended to the question of individual differences in attachment. Mary Ainsworth, a student of Bowlby's, had demonstrated that children develop stable, traitlike *patterns of attachment* (eventually denoted *attachment styles*) based on the quality of their relationship with the caregiver (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). In Ainsworth's framework, *secure* infants are those with sensitive and responsive caregivers, who consistently experienced proximity to these caregivers as distress alleviating. As a result, they come to view themselves as competent and worthy of love and to view others as willing and able to provide comfort and support. Infants with an *anxious* attachment style experienced inconsistent caregiving and consequently seek repeated reassurance of the availability of their attachment figures. Infants with an *avoidant* attachment style tended to be rebuffed by their attachment figures and therefore learned not to seek contact with them when distressed.

Hazan and Shaver argued that if adult romantic relationships are functionally analogous to infant–caregiver attachments, then the same individual differences that characterize children's orientations toward their attachment figures should also characterize adults' orientations toward romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver, Hazan, & Bradshaw, 1988). They presented preliminary data in support of this claim, based on a brief community survey, and it was not long before numerous researchers were testing—and confirming—their basic claims using more rigorous research designs and increasingly diverse samples. Just as avoidant infants had been observed to resist contact with caregivers when distressed, avoidantly attached adults resisted contact with romantic partners when distressed; just as anxious infants were found to be hypervigilant for cues of the caregiver's attention and responsiveness, so, too, were anxiously attached adults with respect to their romantic partners.

Since that time, thousands of studies have documented associations between attachment styles and romantic relationship functioning (Shaver & Brennan, 1992). For example, anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals have less trust in their romantic partners than do secure individuals (Brennan & Shaver, 1995; Simpson, 1990); they adopt negative and suspicious interpretations of their partners' motives (Collins, 1996; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996), and they respond with greater anger, hostility, and resentment to a partner's negative behavior (Collins, 1996; Mikulincer, 1998b; Rholes, Simpson, & Orina, 1999). They are less likely to seek and provide support and reassurance to partners (Carnelley, Pietromonaco, & Jaffe, 1996; Cobb, Davila, & Bradbury, 2001; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Ognibene & Collins, 1998; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) and are more likely to pursue destructive patterns of escalation or withdrawal in response to conflict (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Crowell et al., 2002; Feeney, 1994; Fitzpatrick, Fey, Segrin, & Schiff, 1993; Gaines et al., 1997; Senchak & Leonard, 1992). Overall, anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals report lower levels of relationship satisfaction, stability, intimacy, cohesion, and commitment (Cobb et al., 2001; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Meyers & Landsberger, 2002; Rholes, Paetzold, & Friedman, 2008; Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Simpson, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003; Tucker & Anders, 1999).

Yet the implications of adult attachment styles extend beyond straightforward thoughts and behaviors regarding romantic partners; attachment styles are theorized to function as cognitive–affective frameworks that organize the encoding, storage, retrieval, and manipulation of information related to affective states and, in particular, experiences of stress versus security. Supporting this view, studies have demonstrated associations between attachment style and individuals' cognitive processing of interpersonal phenomena as well as capacities and strategies for regulating positive and negative emotions. For example, anxiously and avoidantly attached adults make less positive and benign interpretations of others' facial expressions (Magai, Hunziker, Mesias, & Culver, 2000), they endorse more negative interpretations of both hypothetical and actual relationship events (Collins, 1996; Lakey, McCabe, Fisicaro, & Drew, 1996; Mikulincer & Florian, 1998; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999; Simpson et al., 1996), and they make more hostile attributions of others' motives (Mikulincer, 1998a). These biased cognitive appraisals have direct implications for emotional experience. Anxiously and avoidantly attached individuals tend to report more frequent and intense negative emotions (Feeney, 1995, 1999; Feeney & Ryan, 1994; Mikulincer & Orbach, 1995), both in response to everyday events and interactions (Pietromonaco & Feldman-Barrett, 1997; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996) as well as in response to naturally occurring (Magai & Cohen, 1998; Mikulincer, 1998a; Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993; Mikulincer, Horesh, Levy Shiff, Manovich, & Shalev, 1998) or laboratory-induced stressors (Mikulincer, 1998a; Rholes et al., 1999).

Attachment in a Life-Span/Developmental Context

One of the most compelling aspects of attachment theory is its life-span perspective. Bowlby famously argued that attachment processes remain central to mental and physical well-being "from the cradle to the grave" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 62). Accordingly, the extension of attachment theory to adult love relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Shaver et al., 1988) has created opportunities for building comprehensive developmental models that use the same core principles to explain the nature, dynamics, and effects of intimate human relationships at all stages of life.

Yet the promise of such sweeping life-span models has largely gone unfulfilled. Rather, contemporary attachment research remains largely bifurcated between developmental investigations of infant–caregiver bonds and social-psychological investigations of adult romantic bonds. Researchers within each tradition emphasize different aspects of attachment and use different methods to capture and evaluate attachment phenomena (reviewed in Allen & Land, 1999; Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Jacobvitz, Curran, & Moller, 2002). Furthermore, the social-psychological literature on adult romantic attachment yields a particularly static picture of attachment phenomena, given that many studies have focused on documenting associations between attachment style and relationship functioning at a single point in time rather than investigating change in both domains and how such change might synergistically interact across different time scales to shape life-span trajectories of relationship experiences and expectations.

To some degree, this is because attachment researchers continue to be somewhat divided over the nature and extent of associations between childhood and adult patterns of attachment security (see, for example, Lewis, Feiring, & Rosenthal, 2000; Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000). Bowlby's (1973b) *prototype hypothesis*, which specified that early attachment security lays the foundation for adult romantic security by fundamentally shaping individuals' expectations and beliefs about love relationships, has been

called the "boldest assertion of attachment theory," serving as "a lightning rod of controversy" among developmental psychologists (Roisman, Collins, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2005, p. 105). The strictest, most "traitlike" version of the prototype hypothesis maintains that infant–caregiver attachment style is laid down in the first year of life and largely "grows up" into adult romantic attachment style, establishing robust working models of adult love dynamics before the individual has even had his or her first relationship. From this perspective, subsequent romantic experiences usually end up strengthening and confirming the individual's initial attachment style because working models function as self-fulfilling prophecies, reliably altering individuals' selection of romantic partners and their ongoing appraisals of the partner's responsiveness and availability.

The evidence for this "strong trait" perspective is mixed. First, longitudinal studies have detected varying degrees of continuity in attachment style from childhood to adulthood (Hamilton, 2000; Lewis et al., 2000; Roisman et al., 2005; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000; Weinfield, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2000) and over adulthood, from relationship to relationship (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Davila, Burge, & Hammen, 1997; Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999; Fraley, 2007; Klohnen & Bera, 1998; Lopez & Gormley, 2002; Mitchell, 2007; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995; Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004). One of the difficulties in drawing robust conclusions from this body of research concerns the wide diversity of measures used to assess adult attachment experiences. Whereas infant patterns of attachment are consistently assessed using the famous Strange Situation, adult attachment is usually evaluated through (a) adult *representations* of attachment to the caregiver (Grossmann, Grossmann, & Kindler, 2005; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005; Steele & Steele, 2005), using the Adult Attachment Interview (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985); or (b) the coherence of adult *narratives* regarding the quality of current romantic relationships (Crowell & Waters, 2005; Grossmann et al., 2005; Sroufe et al., 2005), assessed in the Current Relationship Inventory (Crowell et al., 2002); (c) concrete qualities of the individual's current relationship, such as commitment, satisfaction, emotional tone, closeness, and constructive approaches to conflict (Crowell & Waters, 2005; Roisman et al., 2005, p. 105; Roisman, Madsen, Hennighausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005); or a combination of these. Notably absent from the majority of long-term prospective studies (with some exceptions, such as Crowell & Waters, 2005) is the Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (ECR; Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), the current self-report method of choice for assessing adult romantic anxiety and avoidance. Hence the degree to which romantic attachment styles (as represented by the ECR) can, in fact, be interpreted as "adult versions" of infant patterns of preoccupation and avoidance (as assessed by the Strange Situation or, later, by the Adult Attachment Interview) remains an open question.

Many researchers have sidestepped this debate by gravitating toward a "two-pronged" conceptualization of adult attachment style, in which individuals maintain both a global working model (carried forward from childhood) which provides a general, traitlike template for an individual's relationship expectations, and also a "relationship-specific" model based on specific attachment figures, such as current or recent romantic partners (Baldwin & Fehr, 1995; Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Collins & Read, 1994; Klohnen, Weller, Luo, & Choe, 2005; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). According to this view, individuals' multiple attachment representations are arranged hierarchically according to their centrality and cognitive accessibility. The appearance of instability in attachment style, then, can be attributed to the fact that current relationships may activate different representational components within the overall hierarchy.

This perspective takes more seriously the phenomenon of reciprocal influence between prior and current attachment expectations and experiences and hence holds more promise for the development of life-span models of attachment that take into account an individual's entire cumulative trajectory of attachment-relevant experiences. In fact, some of the most promising new approaches in this vein use information about the patterning, sequencing, and variability of attachment experiences over time to understand the conditions under which stability is either maintained or disrupted. Fraley and his colleagues, for example, have explored connectionist and dynamical systems models of attachment style over the life span (Fraley, 2007; Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004), seeking to explain which types of relationship trajectories are likely to produce stability versus change in attachment representations and the *mechanisms* underlying these dynamic processes. Using a series of computer simulations, for example, Fraley has demonstrated that when an individual's history of attachment experiences changes gradually—but consistently—over the entire course of development so that it becomes increasingly differentiated from the prototypical infant–caregiver pattern, then by the time the individual reaches adulthood, the early pattern may be entirely "rewritten" by more recent and salient experiences. In such a case, infant–caregiver attachment style ceases to behave like a trait altogether, and its potential influence on future psychosocial development is superseded by current attachment experiences. However, using the same simulation strategy, Fraley also demonstrated that if the original, prototypical pattern is periodically *reexperienced* with enough frequency (for example, if an adult becomes involved with several romantic partners who are "just like my mother"), then the stability of the original pattern is notably reinforced and enhanced, magnifying its influence as an ongoing engine for developmental change over the life span.

What is important and generative about this approach is not only its emphasis on interindividual variation in the relative influence of developmental history (also emphasized by the seminal work of Davila and colleagues, Davila, Burge, & Hammen, 1997; Davila & Sargent, 2003), but its focus on identifying the underlying cognitive mechanisms through which different sequential histories of attachment experiences potentiate stability versus change. This dynamic, connectionist approach poses important correctives to the notion that one's "original" attachment style is always lying dormant, "underneath it all," ready to be reactivated at any time (see Sroufe, Egeland, & Kreutzer, 1990). At the same time, this approach also argues that the individual's attachment history is unlikely to be completely superseded by present experiences (i.e., Kagan, 1980). Rather, the relative influence of the past versus the present depends on the specific sequence of attachment experiences that the individual has encountered over time, a notion that harkens back to Bowlby's initial contention that development always represents an integration of developmental history and current circumstances (Bowlby, 1973b, 1980). From this perspective, questions regarding the "stability" and "change" of attachment patterns can never be answered globally. Rather, they depend fundamentally on individuals' specific sequencing of close relationships over the entire course of life-span development, as well as the sequencing of attachment-relevant experiences within an individual's most important and longstanding current relationships.

We have taken the time to spell out this dynamic, interactionist perspective on longitudinal trajectories of attachment because we think that this approach provides a powerful framework for understanding life-span/developmental trajectories of *all* romantic relationship phenomena. Each of the domains reviewed in this chapter—from relationship satisfaction to commitment to violence—can be conceptualized as having its own developmental history within an individual's life span, pushed and pulled by distinctive sequences of "person–situation," "trait–state" interactions at different stages of development. Hence, as with attachment style, we make no presumptions about the relative stability of certain cognitive, emotional, or behavioral phenomena enacted within intimate relationships. Rather, we consider all of these phenomena to show varying degrees of stability and change over the life span as a function of long-range sequences of intimate relationship experiences.

From this perspective, individuals' earliest romantic ties take on heightened significance. Bowlby (1973) argued, and dynamical systems theorists echo (reviewed in Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004), that although early-developing prototypes do not have deterministic influences on later experiences, they nonetheless have enduring influences. In essence, then, the seeds of an individual's eventual pattern of romantic relationship experience can be discerned within the nascent relationships formed during adolescence and emerging adulthood. With this in mind, we now turn to the burgeoning research on adolescent romantic relationships and to the experiences and dynamics that provide the launching pad for their future romantic trajectories.

ADOLESCENT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Although the vast majority of research on intimate relationships is conducted with adults between 20 and 40 years of age, clearly individuals begin participating in romantic ties much earlier. Men's and women's first substantive romantic ties are usually formed during their adolescent years, as they gradually shift their emotional investments to peers over parents (reviewed in Florsheim, 2003; Furman, Feiring, & Brown, 1999). In the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), roughly a quarter of participants reported that they had been involved in a romantic relationship by age 12 and that percentage increased to nearly three quarters by age 18 (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003). Yet historically, adolescent romantic relationships have received scant empirical attention. It has primarily been since the mid-1990s that their potential significance for adolescent social, psychological, and sexual development has been rigorously investigated (Crouter & Booth, 2006; Davila, Stroud, Miller, & Steinberg, 2007; Florsheim, 2003; Furman et al., 1999). Recent studies have consistently found that adolescent participation in romantic relationships poses both risks and

benefits. On the positive side, youths' budding romantic ties provide opportunities to master strong emotions, regulate impulses, practice interpersonal skills, and make decisions about healthy behavior. On the negative side, they pose risks for sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, emotional distress, relationship violence, and physical health problems related to chronic stress. This, of course, is consistent with the developmental premises that we articulated earlier: Intimate relationships are driven by developmentally specific psychosocial capacities and simultaneously drive future psychosocial development. The critical issue, then, is to determine which developmentally specific skills and capacities provide the necessary foundations for youths' first intimate relationships and which types of relationships have adaptive or maladaptive effects on youths' subsequent development.

Pathways through Risk and Well-Being

Supporting the notion that successful intimate relationships require a certain degree of developmental maturity, research has found that the *timing and context* of youths' romantic involvements is associated with their adjustment and development. For example, negative consequences for adolescent psychological well-being and sexual risk behaviors appear to be greatest among adolescents who begin to date very early (i.e., 14 or younger) or who report a large number of concurrent or successive dating partners. Several studies have shown that higher levels of romantic involvement in early and middle adolescence are linked with earlier and more frequent sexual activity (Phinney, Jensen, Olsen, & Cundick, 1990; Scott-Jones & White, 1990), increased substance use and delinquency (Davies & Windle, 2000; Neemann, Hubbard, & Masten, 1995), lower educational aspirations and achievement (Neemann et al., 1995; Parks & Eggert, 1993), greater depression (Parks & Eggert, 1993; Quatman, Sampson, Robinson, & Watson, 2001), lower self-esteem (McDonald & McKinney, 1994), and negative trajectories of psychosocial adjustment (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2001). In addition, romantic breakups during adolescence are frequent triggers for depression and suicidality (Monroe, Rohde, Seeley, & Lewinsohn, 1999).

Yet little is known about the specific psychological mechanisms through which these associations operate. Studies suggest a range of possibilities, including general unconventionality, preexisting adjustment and self-regulatory problems; involvement with older (and more delinquent) peers, cascading effects of premature social transitions, and disconnection from social institutions such as school, church, and family (Bearman & Bruckner, 2002; Bingham & Crockett, 1996; Crockett, Raffaelli, & Shen, 2006; Halpern, Waller, Spriggs, & Hallfors, 2006; Manlove et al., 2001; B. C. Miller et al., 1997; Resnick et al., 1997). It is likely that different factors prove significant for different youths, but at the present time, we lack the necessary longitudinal, process-oriented data to elucidate these potential pathways.

Alternative Relationship Forms

We also know little about the developmental implications of "alternative" forms of romantic relationships, which appear to be increasingly common. Historically, most youths pursued their first sexual experiences within established romantic relationships (Abma, Chandra, Mosher, Peterson, & Piccinino, 1997; Giordano, Longmore, & Manning, 2006; Manning, Longmore, & Giordano, 2000). Yet recent studies suggest that growing numbers of youths are pursuing intimate ties that deviate from a conventional "couple" model (i.e., relatively exclusive, mutually acknowledged romantic and sexual involvement), such as "friends with benefits" (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Manning et al., 2000; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). In these arrangements, the two partners start out as friends, and they decide to periodically engage in sexual behavior but not to become a "couple." The relationship is not expected to be exclusive and may or may not be disclosed to peers. The level of mutual intimacy, support, and closeness is not expected to change (if the partners started out as close friends, these dimensions might already be high), and there is no expectation of becoming a conventional couple in the future.

The overall prevalence of such relationships is unknown, but some researchers have questioned whether they introduce risks for youths' sexual and mental well-being, particularly women. Given that sexual behavior pursued outside the context of a romantic relationship remains less acceptable for girls than boys (Baumeister & Twenge, 2002; Crawford & Popp, 2003), it is likely that the immediate and long-term implications of "alternative" sexual-romantic experiences are gender-specific. Support for this view comes from research demonstrating that among women, alternative relationships are frequently associated with shame, disappointment, regret, and sometimes sexual coercion (Caruthers, 2006; M. Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Stepp, 2007). Other researchers have challenged these pessimistic accounts, arguing that alternative romantic arrangements may allow young women to break free of gender-stereotypical relationship roles and express their own interpersonal agency (Caruthers, 2006).

For example, Giordano and colleagues (2006) found that young adults who pursued "friends with benefits" relationships described these relationships as positive contexts for sexual experimentation and release, given that the underlying friendship was described as creating a context of stability and familiarity without the potential volatility and role constraints associated with conventional dating. Studies of college students suggest that when individuals feel that they know and understand a friend's intentions and feelings regarding casual sexual activity, it can be appraised as positive and beneficial (Afifi & Faulkner, 2000). In the end, then, alternative romantic relationships have the potential to be either maladaptive or adaptive, depending on the characteristics and expectations of the participants, their age and level of psychological maturity, the circumstances under which these relationships occur (for example, whether both partners chose the arrangement or whether one partner would prefer to have "something more"), and their positioning in a youth's overall trajectory of romantic-sexual experiences.

Before leaving adolescence, the question of gender differences deserves attention. Previous research suggests that close relationships play a particularly central role for girls' development (L. M. Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982) and that the negotiation of changing relationships is a primary struggle for girls during the adolescent years (Gilligan, 1990). A particular risk is for girls to subsume their own desires and needs for the sake of preserving their relationships (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006), which can have serious detrimental implications for their willingness and capacity to express their sexual and emotional needs; to walk away from partners who denigrate, harm, or threaten them; and to protect themselves from risky sexual practices (Impett et al., 2006; Tolman, 2002). In contrast, research indicates that adolescent boys' socialization toward stoicism and competition leads them to place less emphasis on emotional connection to romantic partners and to place a greater emphasis on sexuality within their romantic ties (Eder, Evans, & Parker, 1995). Others have argued that boys' seeming resistance to intimacy has been overemphasized (Giordano et al., 2006), and have used qualitative methodologies to elucidate the conflicts boys experience between cultural dictates regarding stoic masculinity and their own desires for emotional intimacy (Tolman, Spencer, Harmon, Rosen-Reynoso, & Striepe, 2004; Way, 1996).

Clearly, one of the most important areas for future research on adolescent romantic relationships concerns the differential developmental trajectories of girls versus boys and the ways in which these trajectories are influenced by youths' own histories of gender-based socialization, as well as the rigidity of their parents', peers', and communities' ideologies regarding gender.

THE RELEVANCE OF EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Romantic relationship researchers have increasingly emphasized *emerging adulthood* as a distinct stage of life (Arnett, 2000, 2001) with distinct developmental challenges in the domain of romantic relationship functioning (Crouter & Booth, 2006). Although most individuals begin dating during adolescence, it is usually not until emerging adulthood that their romantic relationships take on the depth and complexity of mature adult relations and during which stable patterns of interpersonal functioning become readily observable (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005).

The relevance of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental stage stems from historical and social-structural factors. Because of significant demographic changes in industrialized countries since the 1960s, individuals no longer transition into full-blown adult roles by their late teens and early 20s. Protracted postsecondary education, delayed marriage, and delayed childbearing create an extended period of transition between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2006a, 2006b). Note, for example, that from 1950 to 1970, the median age for first marriage in the United States was between 20 and 21 for women and around 23 for men; these ages have been rising steadily and are now at an all-time high: 26 for women and 28 for men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Presently, most 18- to 25-year-olds feel they have undoubtedly matured past adolescence yet do not consider themselves full adults (Arnett, 2000, 2001) and have not accepted the responsibilities associated with long-term interpersonal and occupational commitments (Arnett, 2001; Carroll et al., 2007).

Many emerging adults view this period of life as a time to explore and experiment with a wide range of possibilities regarding both work and love (Arnett, 2000), ideally with the goal of creating a life plan that will guide them through the ensuing years (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978; Tanner, 2006). During this

self-focused, exploratory, and uncertain life phase, emerging adults typically retain strong ties to parents. Studies of college-aged adults have found that around 60% continue to view their mother or their father as their primary source of emotional support and security. Hence, whereas friends and romantic partners typically rival parents as primary support providers by late adolescence (Doherty & Feeney, 2004), for many emerging adults, this process of "transferring attachment" from parents to peers (Hazan & Zeifman, 1994) is somewhat protracted. This fits with Carroll and colleagues' (2007) view of emerging adulthood as "a transitional period between a person's family of origin and his or her family of formation" (p. 223). Indeed, Arnett (2000) suggested that while the guiding relationship question for adolescents may be "Who would I enjoy being with, here and now?" that of emerging adults is "Given the kind of person I am, what kind of person do I wish to have as a partner through life?" (p. 473).

Does this shift in emphasis influence the quality and dynamics of emerging adults' romantic ties, relative to the ties they pursued during adolescence? Arnett (2000) has argued that the romantic relationships of emerging adulthood differ notably from those of adolescence, characterized by less emphasis on companionship and greater emphasis on the potential for deeper emotional intimacy. Commitment, too, tends to increase; emerging adults' relationships tend to last longer than those of adolescents and are more likely to involve cohabitation (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994; Martin, Martin, & Martin, 2001). Physical intimacy also becomes more important and more common, and emerging adults' romantic relationships are more likely than those of adolescents to include sexual intercourse (Laumann et al., 1994). Of note, sexual intimacy during emerging adulthood is another area in which we see a historical shift. In part because of the invention of the birth control pill, it is now normative and widely accepted for emerging adults to be sexually active before marriage (Arnett, 2006b).

The tendency for individuals in their early 20s to pursue protracted developmental transitions between adolescence and adulthood may be here to stay, and yet there has been relatively little research on the distinctive attributes *and* long-term implications of emerging adults' romantic ties. This is likely to be an area of increased investigation in the coming years and provides a fascinating domain in which to explore the interaction among individual-level, dyadic, familial, and cultural factors in shaping young men's and women's relationship trajectories.

SETTLING INTO ADULTHOOD: SATISFACTION AND STABILITY

Perhaps the two most intensively researched questions when it comes to mature romantic relationships during the adult years are "What keeps relationships together?" and "What keeps relationships happy?" Empirically based attempts to understand and predict the twin outcomes of relationship *stability* and *satisfaction* stretch back to the 1930s (Terman & Buttenweiser, 1935) and continue unabated to this day. Of course, from a life-span/developmental perspective, stability and satisfaction are not really outcomes at all but dynamic states constantly made and remade by the unfolding interaction between each partner's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors. We therefore prefer to think of *trajectories* of stability and satisfaction than fixed levels. At any point in time, we can take a snapshot of these moving targets and analyze their developmental history (across multiple prior relationships as well as within any one relationship), their immediate dynamics, and their future implications for individual and couple functioning.

To be sure, studies that attempt to move beyond isolated snapshots and strive to capture long-range trajectories of stability and satisfaction often yield pessimistic conclusions. For example, longitudinal studies have found that after an initial "newlywed peak," adults' marital satisfaction tends to decline progressively over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kurdek, 1998a), especially among couples with children (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992), although there is notable variability among couples regarding the magnitude and rate of change (Carrère, Buehlman, Gottman, Coan, & Ruckstuhl, 2000; Cohan & Bradbury, 1997; Gottman, Coan, Carrère, & Swanson, 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kurdek, 1998a; P. J. E. Miller, Niehuis, & Huston, 2006). Approximately 30% of U.S. couples divorce within 10 years of marriage. For people under age 45, 50% of first marriages will end in divorce for men and 45% to 50% for women. Rates of overall dissolution (taking into account unmarried, cohabiting couples) are undoubtedly much higher (Kitson, 2006). Clearly, staying together and staying happy are lifelong, context-dependent, developmentally specific challenges. In this section, we review key findings from research on these challenges and consider their implications for understanding lifespan trajectories of intimate relationship functioning.

Conceptualization and Assessment of Relationship Satisfaction

Reliable assessment of relationship satisfaction is more difficult than it might at first appear. One problem is that the construct itself is notoriously vague (Gottman, 1998), making its operationalization problematic. Another hurdle is the lack of rigorous theory—and especially developmental theory—about the determinants of satisfaction across the life course. Accordingly, attempts to develop measures of satisfaction have been largely atheoretical (Fincham & Beach, 2006; Glenn, 1990). Existing measures of relationship satisfaction emphasize a wide array of domains, and there is no consensus on which remain the most central and important. Some domains are explicitly behavioral, focusing on objective events such as verbal disagreements or specific attempts to accommodate the others' needs. Others emphasize subjective feelings and attitudes, such as regrets about getting married or the degree to which one feels loved and admired. Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) argued that *perceived partner responsiveness* lies at the heart of relationship satisfaction and encompasses global beliefs (originating in childhood attachment relationships but constantly "updated" through day-to-day couple functioning) that one's partner affirms, supports, and values central features of one's self.

Because most measures contain a mix of objective and subjective elements, summary indices of "satisfaction" often prove difficult to interpret. One question which has received increasing attention is whether relationship satisfaction is categorical or continuous (Beach, Fincham, Amir, & Leonard, 2005; Fincham & Beach, 2006). Although many studies have detected linear correlations between *degrees* of relationship satisfaction and a variety of individual and couple-level processes, other studies suggest that when dissatisfaction is high and stable enough, it creates pervasive perceptual and behavioral biases which feed forward to escalate conflict and distress, making it increasingly difficult for couples to change the direction of their unraveling trajectories. In such cases, it may be more meaningful to characterize a couple as categorically "unhappy" than to try and pin down their specific *degree* of unhappiness.

Another issue for assessment is whether satisfaction reflects concrete, objective features of the relationship (for example, frequency of conflict) versus each partner's subjective *beliefs and feelings* regarding the relationship. Given that nearly all measures of relationship satisfaction are based on self-report, objective and subjective features of a relationship tend to be conflated. This is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that two partners in a relationship often provide markedly divergent reports about the concrete behaviors and interactions supposedly occurring on a day-to-day basis (Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Christensen & Nies, 1980; S. L. Gable, Reis, & Downey, 2003; D. A. Smith & Peterson, 2008). Importantly, many researchers argue that identifying the objective "truth" of day-to-day behavior in a couple is not nearly as important as establishing partners' global evaluations of the relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987a; Norton, 1983), particularly because these global evaluations shape the way that partners interpret, remember, and respond to each and every relationship experience (Gottman, 1990). Extensive research, for example, has documented the phenomenon of "sentiment override" in relationships, in which partners respond *non-contingently* to particular relationship events and partner behaviors (as well as to researchers' inquiries about the relationship) because they are guided by their dominant sentiment regarding the relationship, rather than the specific facts or experiences at hand. Hence, sentiment override represents one of the processes through which global views of one's current relationship may actually exert a stronger press on future interpersonal development than the "concrete facts" of day-to-day relationship behavior.

Finally, there is the dimension of time. The majority of relationship quality measures ask individuals to report on *current* feelings and behaviors. Yet of course, relationships evolve and change over time, and studies have reliably demonstrated that although newlyweds often report high levels of satisfaction, they also frequently report precipitous declines in satisfaction soon after the wedding (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kurdek, 1998a). Hence, *maintaining* satisfaction over broad stretches of time, especially in the face of each partner's changing life tasks, stressors, skills, and developmental challenges, might be viewed as the true marker of relationship success (Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Canary & Stafford, 1992, 1994). However, few assessment approaches adopt a broad-based, lifespan perspective on satisfaction. As a result, although we have ably documented the numerous cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of satisfying versus dissatisfying relationships, we know little about how each component changes over the lifespan, and whether there are adaptive shifts in the relative importance of different components at different stages of life course. These are important questions for future developmental research on satisfaction.

Negative Behavior

One of the most widely assessed correlates of relationship satisfaction and stability concerns negative behaviors such as hostility, criticism, and disengagement. Studies

using objective, laboratory–based observations of couple behavior have yielded similar conclusions as have studies relying on self-report measures: negative behaviors are associated with lower satisfaction and increased chances of dissolution (Creasey & Jarvis, 2008; Fincham & Beach, 2006; Gottman & Notarius, 2000, 2002; Weiss & Heyman, 1997). In fact, Gottman's well-known program of longitudinal, multimethod research found that divorce could be reliably predicted by the presence of four behaviors in particular, assessed during a videotaped laboratory session: stonewalling, criticism, contempt, and defensiveness (Gottman, 1991, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Gottman's research suggests that the most dangerous and detrimental pattern is one in which couples' negative behaviors—and perhaps more importantly, their associated negative affect—progressively escalate in intensity, making it increasingly difficult to terminate aversive interchanges (Gottman, 1998). For some partners, this is when they resort to "*stonewalling*," or disengaging from the interaction and ceasing to respond to the partner at all (Gottman, 1994; Gottman et al., 1998).

Another particularly common and aversive type of couple behavior is the "demand-withdrawal" pattern (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000; Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Eldridge & Christensen, 2002; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007; Vogel & Karney, 2002), in which one partner (usually the female) makes a series of escalating demands and criticisms which are met by increased stonewalling, passivity, and unresponsiveness from the other partner (usually the male). Although there are reliable gender differences in demand-withdrawal behavior, studies have also found that demand-withdrawal behavior is structured by the power dynamics of the conflict, such that the partner who is criticizing or trying to change the other takes the "demand" role (Klinetob & Smith, 1996). However the roles are distributed, demand-withdrawal behavior is associated with decreased satisfaction in both partners, and a number of psychophysiological studies have also found it to be associated with heightened autonomic nervous system activity indicative of psychological stress and perceptions of threat (Heffner et al., 2006; Kiecolt-Glaser, Newton, Cacioppo, & MacCallum, 1996).

Not surprisingly, the negative behaviors just discussed occur most frequently in the context of conflict, and there is an extensive literature examining the predictors, topics, typologies, and implications of couple conflict over the life span (reviewed in Booth & Crouter, 2001; Kline, Pleasant, Whitton, & Markman, 2006). One of the obstacles in studying conflict dynamics in romantic couples is the unavoidable ambiguity regarding definitions of conflict. Technically, any interaction in which partners have opposing goals and interests can be defined as a conflict (Bell & Blakeney, 1977; Bradbury, Rogge, & Lawrence, 2001), yet this broad definition lumps together screaming matches with quietly seething "discussions." Hence, over the years, researchers investigating the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction and stability have moved away from studying discrete episodes of conflict in favor of understanding broad-based distinctions between functional versus dysfunctional conflict management. This body of research suggests that conflict patterns characterized by negative escalation, invalidation, withdrawal, and violence are particularly destructive, gradually and progressively eroding couples' bonds to one another (Gill, Christensen, & Fincham, 1999; Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Notarius, 2000, 2002; Markman & Notarius, 1987; Stanley, Blumberg, & Markman, 1999).

Notably, this body of research has found that destructive conflict-management patterns can be observed in couples long before their marriage began to develop signs of strain and that the detrimental effects of these patterns are not moderated by the presence of positive interchanges (Markman & Notarius, 1987; Notarius & Markman, 1993). This is not to suggest that positive interchanges are irrelevant; in sufficient amounts, positive interchanges can successfully prevent negative escalation and ameliorate some of the immediate affective consequences of conflict. However, relatively high and sustained levels of positivity are necessary to confer these benefits (Gottman & Levenson, 1992). The fact that negative behaviors are so predictive of relationship satisfaction might seem to offer some hope to distressed couples—after all, it would seem that negative behaviors such as excessive criticism can be easily curtailed with a little willpower. Yet studies have also found that dysfunctional behavioral patterns are observable early in a relationship and that they tend to remain stable over time (Bradbury & Karney, 1993; Gottman et al., 1998; Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

This, of course, raises again the central question of developmental change and whether there are discernible factors that differentiate between couples who successfully redirect and repair dysfunctional trajectories of conflict resolution and those who do not. Some researchers have argued that the stability of maladaptive interpersonal behaviors is partly attributable to the fact that these behaviors are strongly influenced by stable, early-developing temperament and personality factors (Caspi, 1987; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Newman, Caspi, Moffitt, & Silva, 1997). From this perspective, it would appear that certain individuals will repeatedly—and even increasingly—resort to maladaptive behaviors in their intimate relationships as their negative relationship experiences and expectations mutually reinforce one another again and again over the life span. Nonetheless, clinical psychologists such as Gottman have attempted to break these cycles, designing educational interventions aimed at pulling distressed couples back from the brink and teaching positive conflict management strategies to newlyweds *before* negative patterns have had a chance to become entrenched (Gottman, 2002; Notarius & Markman, 1993). Yet the question of how *much* lasting change is possible—among *which* couples—remains unknown, given the relatively short timeframe of most follow-up studies. On the basis of our developmental assumption that relationships tend to have "cascading" patterns of influence on psychosocial and interpersonal functioning over the life span, one might expect that certain key changes in negative behavior (for example, a reduction in demand–withdrawal interactions during conflict) might appear to be relatively trivial when first established but might have progressively larger positive effects on both relationship development and individual psychosocial functioning over the long-term course of development. A fascinating question for future research concerns whether there are reliable factors that maximize a couple's likelihood of experiencing *escalating* benefits, over the life span, of early reparative interventions.

Positive Behavior

Although positive behaviors have the potential to "counteract" the potentially detrimental effects of negative behaviors in a relationship, it takes a fairly large number of positive behaviors to do so. Gottman, for example, found that highly satisfied couples tended to report at least five positive behaviors for every negative behavior (Gottman, 1994). In such couples, a high and stable ratio of positive to negative behaviors may create a climate of warmth, support, and solidarity that facilitates adaptive responses to everyday relationship stressors, making it easier to "ride out" periods of strain and also feeding forward to promote continued positive interpersonal and overall psychosocial development. This may account for the fact that in couples with high levels of affectionate expression, negative behavior on the part of one's spouse is less strongly related to one's own marital satisfaction (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Huston & Chorost, 1994).

Notably, Gottman, Coan, Carrère, and Swanson (1998) found that in a sample of newly married couples, exchanges of positive affect *during* conflict proved to be the only reliable predictor of marital satisfaction and stability 6 years later. Similarly, a study by Driver and Gottman (2004) found that even in the context of relatively trivial, mundane interactions, humor, playfulness, and affection proved adaptive. Couples with high levels of these behaviors in the course of everyday life were better able to mobilize such behaviors to maintain a constructive dialogue with their partner during conflict.

Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, and Lipkus (1991) have described this phenomenon as *accommodation*, in which one partner responds constructively to the other partner's negative or potentially destructive behavior, rather than responding with defensiveness, criticism, or anger. Accommodation might take the form of apologizing to a partner, forgiving him or her for a transgression, introducing humor or affection into a potentially difficult interaction, or simply "letting go" of a complaint or a perceived slight. Accommodation is important because it can interrupt potentially negative chains of interaction, ensuring that periodic transgressions remain periodic (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Gottman, 1993; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, Cox, & Bradbury, 1998). Along these lines, we would further argue that accommodation is also likely to confer long-term benefits because it fundamentally changes the basic interpersonal foundation on which each partner's own ensuing interpersonal and individual development is based. Just as infant–caregiver attachment security is theorized to establish an enduring sense that the world is a safe place in which transgressions are be forgiven and in which mistakes do not result in the loss of love, accommodative processes may serve the same function, reinforcing both partners' sense of security and allowing them to "recover" from stressful and dysfunctional episodes in their relationship without incurring lasting shifts toward maladaptive trajectories of relationship development.

Accommodation, of course, is not easy. Most individuals' immediate responses to negative interpersonal behavior tend to be self-centered, self-protective, and potentially destructive (Thibaut & Kelley, 1978). To override these automatic tendencies, accommodation requires two key ingredients: the *motive* to respond constructively, which is strongly associated with one's commitment to and investment in the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1991), and *self-regulatory capacity*, which allows individuals to resist destructive, self-centered impulses and replace them with

prosocial behaviors (Finkel & Campbell, 2001; see also Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). Perunovic and Holmes (2008) argued that because the personality trait of agreeableness has been found to be associated with prosocial motivation (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997) as well as strong capacities for self-regulation in the context of relationships (Ahadi & Rothbart, 1994), highly agreeable individuals should be more likely to adopt accommodative approaches to negative partner behavior and should do so relatively automatically, requiring relatively little effortful control or consideration. This was exactly what they found. In fact, highly agreeable individuals were actually more accommodating to their partners in experimental scenarios that did not permit them the time to consider rationally or weigh their behavior. Hence, this research helps to explain why agreeable individuals tend to report higher relationship satisfaction and stability: Not only do they tend to perceive their partners in a more positive light (making them less likely to react with extreme negative affect to problematic or ambiguous relationship events), but when they do take note of partner transgressions, their robust interpersonal self-regulation allows them to respond constructively and avoid negative escalation.

Although positive behaviors such as accommodation obviously carry immediate benefits, longitudinal research has found that day-to-day positive feelings and behaviors are also critically important for *long-term* relationship satisfaction and stability over the life span. Gottman and Levenson (2000) found that over a 14-year period, partners' negative affectivity during conflict reliably predicted early—but not later—divorcing. In direct contrast, low levels of positive affectivity during routine, nonconflictual discussions predicted later—but not early—divorcing. These findings demonstrate that to achieve long-term success with establishing and maintaining a satisfying romantic relationship, couples must work toward building a foundation of mutual enjoyment, pleasure, and playfulness with one another. Over the long term, such a climate can potentially buffer partners against "low points" in their relationship by creating a climate of positivity and security.

Social Support

Another form of positive behavior that has received extensive attention is social support. Yet contrary to the findings regarding accommodation, displays of social support have more complicated patterns of association with relationship satisfaction and well-being. Although individuals in satisfying relationships generally describe their partners as supportive and responsive (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Reis et al., 2004; Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, & Gross, 2006), studies have found that *specific, observable* displays of support do not have beneficial effects on emotional well-being, a finding that has been attributed to the possibility that such observable displays simple reinforce the recipient's feelings of stress or weakness, implicitly suggesting that one's partner views him or her as incompetent (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Bolger et al., 2000; Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008; Shrout, Herman, & Bolger, 2006).

Hence the most adaptive situation, according to these studies, is created when partners are confident of one another's overall supportiveness but remain unaware of *specific* supportive acts undertaken to assist them. Such "invisible support" (Bolger et al., 2000) provides all the benefits of social support with none of the downsides. It is also notable that this model of effective support provision shares many similarities with research findings reviewed earlier demonstrating the importance of an overall climate of positivity, playfulness, and responsiveness. Collectively, these findings indicate that positive behaviors between partners—even those that are transacted with such subtlety that they fail to be detected—provide the "bricks and mortar" of a well-functioning relationship. The beneficial effects of any one of these behaviors might not be immediately observable, but over the course of a long relationship, they weave a fabric of connectedness, trust, mutual support, and enjoyment between partners that fuels adaptive relationship processes over the long term.

Changes in Positive and Negative Behaviors over the Life Span

Research on the relative importance of positive and negative behaviors for relationship satisfaction helps to clarify some of the intriguing findings that have emerged from research on romantic relationships in late life. Contrary to the common stereotype that relationship satisfaction progressively declines across middle adulthood (Pineo, 1961), longitudinal studies have found evidence for a curvilinear pattern, in which the midlife dip in relationship satisfaction (relative to the early, giddy years) is followed by an *increase* in late life (Rollins, 1989). The explanation for this pattern may involve the all-important balance of positive to negative relationship experiences and dimensions: Younger couples tend report high levels of both positive and negative relationship qualities. Middle-aged couples—who report the lowest levels of satisfaction relative to other points in the life span—tend to report lower levels of positive qualities coupled with high levels of negative qualities. Yet intriguingly, older couples are *most* likely to exemplify a state of happy marriage, combining high amounts of positive qualities with low levels of negatives (Gilford & Bengtson, 1979).

Why are older couples more successful than younger couples in "accentuating the positive?" Carstensen's socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999) provides one potential explanation. Carstensen and colleagues argued that individuals maintain an unconscious awareness of the passage of time in the context of their own life span, such that old age brings an inevitable awareness of the limited time horizon ahead. Carstensen et al. argued that this awareness of limited future time fundamentally shapes the social and psychological goals of older people, motivating them to realign their priorities to emphasize and maximize positive and emotionally meaningful experiences and to deemphasize trivial and negative experiences (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003; Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, & Nesselroade, 2000). This shift in priority has direct implications for the quality of older adults' romantic ties (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 2004). Whereas younger couples are highly motivated to resolve ongoing conflicts for the sake of the long-term prospects of their relationship (inevitably heightening their awareness and experience of negative interactions), this goal becomes less pressing in late life, at which point couples have obviously succeeded in sustaining their relationship despite a certain number of irresolvable conflicts and ongoing tensions. Hence, as individuals' time horizons become shortened, they shift their focus from resolving relationship problems to deemphasizing them relative to the positive dimensions of their relationship.

Commitment

We have already extensively discussed the many factors that predict relationship satisfaction, and because satisfaction and commitment are highly correlated (reviewed in Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, & Clarke, 2006), many of these factors also promote relationship commitment. Not always, however: Commitment also has its own psychological architecture, and understanding how it differs from satisfaction—and may thrive in the absence of satisfaction—provides important insights into the basic dynamics underlying long-term romantic bonds over the life span.

Much of the present interest in relationship commitment can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, when sharp increases in the U.S. divorce rate sparked interest in understanding how and why some couples stayed together in the face of adversity, whereas others did not (reviewed in Adams & Jones, 1999; Levinger, 1966). Early research focused on identifying demographic predictors of marital stability, including partners' ages, levels of education, and socioeconomic status (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978). Yet researchers soon gravitated to an emphasis on the cognitive, affective, and interpersonal *processes* shaping individuals' decisions to enter—and capacities to maintain—committed relationships. It bears noting that although the majority of this research was initially conducted with married couples, studies of commitment have increasingly included unmarried, cohabiting, and same-sex couples, and many of the findings appear to generalize quite reliably to these ties. Perhaps the broadest and more serviceable definition of commitment is *the intention to maintain a relationship*. Despite its seeming simplicity, this straightforward intention appears to be the most powerful proximate predictor of relationship stability (reviewed in Rusbult et al., 2006). Why, then, do some individuals develop and maintain this powerful intention, whereas others do not? A number of theoretical models have been advanced over the years to answer this question. These models are not mutually exclusive, but they adopt somewhat different emphases and perspectives.

Levinger's pioneering work (1965) examined commitment—or "cohesiveness"—as a function of three fundamental interpersonal "forces": *present attractions*, *alternative attractions*, and *barriers*. Present attractions included the psychological and material benefits associated with one's current relationship, whereas alternative attractions included the benefits that could be gained by leaving the relationship (potentially—although not necessarily—for another partner). Barriers include obstacles to leaving the relationship, which include everything from inconvenience to financial hardship to social stigmatization to love. M. P. Johnson (1973, 1999) similarly emphasized the multifaceted nature of commitment, distinguishing motives such as love from those such as social disapproval. In his model, however, he used these motives to conceptualize three distinct types of commitment: Personal commitment (maintaining a relationship because one finds it enjoyable and satisfying), moral commitment (maintaining a relationship because of perceived moral or ethical obligations), and structural or "constraint" commitment (maintaining a relationship because it is too costly or too difficult to leave). Although Johnson's tripartite model might at first appear simplistic, he actually

perceived each type of commitment as multidimensional and multifaceted. Moral commitment, for example, incorporated not only an individual's potential religious beliefs about the sanctity of marriage vows but also a sense of ethical obligation to one's partner, especially if the partner was perceived to have made notable sacrifices for the relationship over the years. Structural commitment included concrete barriers to dissolution (inability to support oneself financially without the partner, complex or expensive divorce proceedings) as well as perceived obstacles (fears of social ostracization). Another important facet of Johnson's model was its flexibility: He noted that any particular relationship might involve different "mixes" of the three types of commitment, potentially yielding quite different subjective experiences.

Of course, each of the aforementioned forces governing commitment—present attractions, alternative attractions, moral constraints, structural barriers—takes different forms and exerts different levels of influence at different stages of development, although little research has systematically examined such changes. For example, the balance of present versus alternative attractions may play a greater role in motivating commitment at earlier stages of the life course, and also at earlier stages of relationship development, whereas structural barriers to dissolution such as children, property, and economic dependence are likely to play more important roles at later stages of relationship development and later stages of the life course.

Investment, Satisfaction, and Alternatives

Arguably the most influential model of commitment is that of Rusbult (1983), who conceptualized individuals' needs and desires for maintaining a relationship as a function of their *satisfaction* with the relationship, the *quality of alternatives* available, and individuals' current and prior *investments* in the relationship (i.e., resources associated with the relationship which would be lost upon dissolution, such as time, money, mutual friends, intimacy). Importantly, Rusbult's model takes account of the fact that the links among satisfaction, commitment, investment, and attention to alternatives are mutually reinforcing. Not only are satisfied couples more likely to make commitments to one another, but high levels of commitment feed back to influence partners' experiences of satisfaction, motivating them to make continued investments in the relationship and to engage in positive behaviors toward one another. This makes Rusbult's model particularly applicable to a life-span/developmental approach to commitment, in which commitment is conceptualized as both the "output" and the "input" of a developing relationship, continually shaping and being shaped by relationship processes over time.

Rusbult's model has received widespread empirical support. As Le and Agnew reported (2003) in a meta-analysis of more than 50 studies including over 11,000 participants in all, there is strong support for the unique contributions of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments to relationship commitment. Furthermore, these distinct components—and commitment level overall—have been found to successfully predict relationship longevity (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Attridge, Berscheid, & Simpson, 1995), satisfaction (Davis & Strube, 1993), accommodation (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Etcheverry & Le, 2005), willingness to sacrifice (Etcheverry & Le, 2005; Powell & Van Vugt, 2003; Van Lange et al., 1997), psychological attachment (Arriaga & Agnew, 2001), relationship violence (Gaertner & Foshee, 1999; Truman-Schram, Cann, Calhoun, & Vanwallendael, 2000), fidelity (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999), and forgiveness (Cann & Baucom, 2004; Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002). Furthermore, Rusbult's model has been shown to apply equally well to heterosexual and same-sex couples (Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996; Kurdek, 1992).

Some of the newer directions in research on commitment involve greater attention to patterns of linear and nonlinear change in levels of commitment (Kurdek, 2003; Rusbult et al., 2006). Commitment does not increase uniformly from the beginning of a relationship onward but may ebb and flow over the course of a relationship—for example, as a function of fluctuations in satisfaction, increased availability of alternatives, slackened efforts at relational maintenance, ruptures in trust, or changes in individual's basic needs for companionship, security, or identity (Arriaga, 2001; Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult et al., 2006). Researchers are increasingly investigating these changes within the context of the multiple perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes through which commitment is manifested over the life span (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998; Etcheverry & Le, 2005). Importantly, both partners in a long-term relationship are likely to undergo gradual developmental changes in their socioemotional needs, life priorities, and the perceived importance of various relationship investments and structural constraints. Yet each partner's developmental changes may occur at drastically different rates or might take them in notably different directions. Hence, a particularly important topic for future research concerns the *dyadic* regulation of commitment over the life span, in the face of each partner's individual developmental trajectory.

The Role of Social Cognition in Relationship Satisfaction

One of the most interesting lines of research that has developed in research on romantic relationships since the 1990shas concerned the many ways in which our cognitions, perceptions, and interpretive "biases" shape the quality and functioning of our intimate relationships. There is a long history of research documenting that individuals generally seek consistency between their cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors (Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1961), and when applied to the realm of romantic relationships, this body of work raises fascinating questions about how subtle biases in our perceptions and interpretations of day-to-day relationship events can alter the everyday reality of relationship functioning, influencing not only our present experiences but also the long-term developmental course of the relationship.

To put it simply, one might posit that there are actually three relationships taking place at any time between two people: One representing the perceptions and biases of Partner 1, one representing the perceptions and biases of Partner 2, and something approximating "the truth." Much initial work on romantic relationship quality, functioning, and satisfaction strived to develop assessments of relationship functioning that most closely represented "the truth," judiciously weeding out the perceptual biases of each partner. Examples of this approach include observational investigations of couple behavior that use independent raters to code objectively partners' facial expressions, language use, and overall behavior (Driver et al., 2003; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Hawkins, Carrère, & Gottman, 2002; Klinetob & Smith, 1996; Welsh, Galliher, Kawaguchi, & Rostosky, 1999). This research has reliably demonstrated that individuals' *perceptions* of their partner's motives, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors often diverge markedly from the *partner's* perceptions (Bolger et al., 2000; Gable et al., 2003) and from objective indices of behavior (Hawkins et al., 2002; Welsh & Dickson, 2005; Welsh et al., 1999). Most important, however, *perception is as important as reality* in predicting couple well-being.

Quite simply, individuals are inevitably biased judges of our own social worlds, and these biases take a range of forms in different individuals: One person perceives relationship threats where there are none; another overlooks his or her partners' obvious signs of dissatisfaction; one person maintains negative, uncharitable views of his or her partner's character, whereas another idealizes his or her partner and the relationship as a whole. Researchers have described these processes as "motivated construals" (Ickes, Simpson, & Ickes, 1997; Murray, 1999), and they help to explain how and why intimate relationships function as both "outputs" and "inputs" of psychosocial development over the life span. Specifically, motivated construals (such as pessimistic expectations of romantic abandonment) are largely derived from our own romantic histories, typically in concert with our histories of parent–child attachment. Hence, these biased perceptions and expectations can be conceptualized as a cognitive synthesis of one's relationship trajectory thus far, inevitably influencing the way in which one feels and behaves toward the current romantic partner. Yet the current partner's behavior is, of course, unpredictable—will he or she "live up" to one's abandonment fears or gradually dismantle them? This will determine whether such fears strengthen or weaken over the course of development, and hence the future shape of one's trajectory of intimate ties. All of the social–cognitive mechanisms in the ensuing discussion play analogous roles in the dynamic, circular linkages between intimate relationship experiences and psychosocial development over the life span.

Attributions

Perhaps the most widely researched form of cognitive "bias" in the context of romantic relationships takes the form of *attributions*, or the explanations that individuals adopt for relationship events and for partner behavior. For example, when a partner says something hurtful, it may be perceived as intentional (*he is really out to get me*) or unintentional (*he obviously didn't realize how touchy I am about my weight*). Loving gestures may be interpreted as genuine expressions of affection (*Flowers! So thoughtful!*) or attempts at manipulation (*What are you trying to cover up?*). Decades of research have shown that individuals in happy, stable relationships tend to attribute positive partner behaviors to stable, enduring characteristics of their partners, whereas negative behaviors are attributed to external, situational influences. In making such attributions, individuals create a perceptual reality in which (a) my partner has my best interests at heart; (b) when good things happen, they are likely to continue; and (c) when bad things happen, they are due to transient, situational factors that can be avoided in the future. These types of attributions are typically described as *relationship enhancing*.

Unhappy individuals make the opposite set of assumptions. The partner's motives are presumed to be selfish or malicious; positive partner behaviors are viewed as unpredictable "flukes," whereas negative behaviors are attributed to stable, enduring features of the partner's basic character. In this version of reality, there is little hope for alleviating current distress or preventing future distress, which is why this set of attributions is typically described as *distress maintaining*.

The influence of attributions on the ongoing development of intimate relationships has received extensive attention, given that distress-maintaining attributions not only predict lower current satisfaction (Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, & Nelson, 1996; Bradbury & Fincham, 1990; Fincham, 2004; Fincham & Bradbury, 1989; Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997) but also longitudinal declines in satisfaction (Fincham, Harold, & Gano-Phillips, 2000; Finchman & Bradbury, 2004; M. D. Johnson, Karney, Rogge, & Bradbury, 2001). Of course, a key question concerns the direction of causation. Do relationship-enhancing attributions actually enhance the relationship, or do they *result* from an already well-functioning bond? Similarly, do distress-maintaining attributions actually impede the healthy development of a relationship, or do they simply provide a reliable marker of an individual's current distress? These questions have been widely debated over the years (M. D. Johnson et al., 2001), and research findings have not provided definitive answers. For example, Bradbury and colleagues (Bradbury et al., 1996) found in an experimental study of couples' problem-solving behavior that wives who initially made distress-maintaining attributions regarding their husbands tended to behave less positively and more negatively toward them in subsequent interactions. Yet this does not necessarily prove that the negative behavior was caused by the attribution—it might equally suggest that wives who tend to behave poorly toward their husbands adopt maladaptive relationship attributions to justify their behavior or that *both* phenomena spring from global dissatisfaction.

A number of longitudinal studies have attempted to resolve the question of causality and have established that although current levels of satisfaction do predict subsequent attributions, attributions also have unique predictive effect on future satisfaction, independent of prior satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). Further evidence for the developmental significance of attributions has come from research demonstrating that when individuals succeed in changing their patterns of attributions, they typically experience corresponding improvements in relationship satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2000). Hence, consistent with the developmental framework we emphasize throughout this chapter, attributions are both developmental "outputs" and "inputs," reflecting a dyad's prior *and* future trajectory of intimacy, security, and satisfaction.

Positive Illusions

Similar conclusions have emerged from research on "positive illusions," which represent extremely generous, optimistic beliefs about the partner's traits and motives that paint the partner in an overly positive light. Research on positive illusions was pioneered by Sandra Murray and John Holmes (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996, 2004), who demonstrated that individuals' biased perceptions of themselves and their partners had profound effects on both partners' behavior and satisfaction. Contrary to the notion that individuals maintaining positive illusions are living in a "fantasy land," doomed to disappointment when their idealized image of the partner eventually breaks down, they found that individuals maintaining overly positive—although still realistic (Neff & Karney, 2003)—perceptions of the partner, and whose partners maintained overly positive perceptions of *them*, were happier and more satisfied with their relationships. These results initially proved surprising because they ran counter to long-established thinking on the importance of *self-verification* in close relationships. Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983) maintains that individuals want to feel authentically known and understood by other individuals, and hence they are motivated to obtain information and evaluations from social partners which verify their own self-views. Self-verification motives were thought to be particularly strong within committed romantic relationships (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Whereas individuals usually want to convey an unduly positive impression of themselves in the early stages of dating and courtship, as a relationship becomes more established and committed, partners increasingly turn to one another for loving feedback on "who they are and who they should become" (Swann et al., 1994, p. 857) and are reassured that their partner loves and accepts their authentic self.

Research on positive illusions suggests that in the context of intimate relationships, motives for self-enhancement often win out over motives for self-verification (see Swann, 1990). Perhaps most intriguing, however, is that positive illusions also subtly influence the partner's behavior over time. Through progressive feedback mechanisms, it appears that partners gradually

adjust their own behaviors—and, over the long term, their own self-concepts—in line with their partner's beneficent expectations and perceptions, essentially "living up" to the positive illusion over time (Murray et al., 1996). This process is similar to that observed by Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, and Whitton's (1999) and denoted the *Michelangelo phenomenon*: Both individual well-being and couple functioning appear to be enhanced when our partners respond to us as if we were, in fact, our own "ideal selves." One of the intriguing aspects of this finding, from a developmental perspective, is the degree to which it resembles some of the fundamental dynamics thought to characterize secure infant–caregiver attachment bonds. Attachment security is thought to shape the child's developing sense of *self* as well his or her developing sense of the attachment figure. The responsiveness, sensitivity, affection, and positive regard of the attachment figure theoretically demonstrates to the child that he or she is worthy of love and affection and also instills trust in, and positive regard for, social partners. The same dynamics are directly relevant to the beneficial effects of positive illusions. The consistent, generous regard of one's romantic partner might function to solidify an individuals' positive sense of self and to enhance positive regard for one's partner, providing a powerful and enduring motive for relationship-enhancing behavior.

Altogether, the provocative body of research on motivated cognition suggests that some of the most developmentally significant aspects of intimate relationships—those that are most strongly influenced by prior interpersonal and psychosocial development and most influential on subsequent development—are not actual interpersonal experiences but rather our *reconstructed interpretations* of these experiences. Does this mean that relationship satisfaction itself—and for that matter, developmental change in satisfaction—is all in our heads?

Not quite: Although individuals' biased perceptions of relational experiences clearly have enduring influences on subsequent relationship satisfaction and functioning (similar, in many ways, to the influence of attachment style), it is the *interaction* between "reality" and "interpretation" that proves most influential (Cook, 2000; Lakey et al., 1996; Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996). As Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004) argued, phenomena such as positive illusions or distress-maintaining attributions involve "a kernel of truth and a shell of motivated elaboration" (p. 214). Hence, our biased interpretations of relationship experience are not fanciful imaginings but rather represent the distillation of day-to-day experience into schematic frameworks that allow us to make reasonable predictions about the future, based on the accumulating knowledge that we carry with us from our own pasts (Carrère et al., 2000; Hawkins et al., 2002; Matthews et al., 1996).

Individual Differences and Relationship Functioning

"Knowledge of the past" is not the only factor shaping our motivated cognitions and perceptual biases. An extensive body of social-personality research suggests that temperament and personality also play critical roles (reviewed in Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). Yet the overall pattern of associations between relationship experiences and personality dimensions is somewhat mixed (reviewed in Simpson, Winterheld, & Chen, 2006), largely because of the diversity of methods and conceptual approaches that have been adopted in investigating these linkages (Cooper & Sheldon, 2002; Simpson et al., 2006). It is also likely that these linkages take different forms, with different strengths, at different stages of the life course, although such developmental changes have not received previous systematic study.

Without question, the personality trait that has been most consistently and strongly related to relationship functioning is neuroticism or trait negative affectivity (Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Caspi, 1987; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Donnellan, Assad, Robins, & Conger, 2007; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995, 1997; Robins et al., 2000; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). The prevailing explanation for this association is that neurotic individuals' low threshold for experiencing distress, hostility, anger, and anxiety has enduring implications for their interpersonal functioning at all stages of the life course (Asendorpf, 2002; Newman et al., 1997; B. W. Roberts, Kuncel, Shiner, Caspi, & Goldberg, 2007), specifically rendering them more reactive to day-to-day interpersonal stressors so that they tend to evaluate their relationships more negatively and to behave less constructively (Caughlin et al., 2000; Donnellan et al., 2007; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Hence, trait negative affectivity constitutes an "enduring vulnerability" that makes it more difficult for individuals to maintain adaptive relationship functioning, particularly in the face of both major and minor stressors (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). An alternative perspective is that negative affectivity does not necessarily precipitate relationship distress but instead results from it (see Amato & Booth, 2001). From this perspective, associations between neuroticism and relationship functioning

are partly due to the fact that individuals in dysfunctional relationships end up "looking" more neurotic on conventional personality measures.

Of course, these two models are not mutually exclusive, and evidence certainly suggests the existence of reciprocal links between neuroticism and relationship dysfunction that tend to exacerbate both domains (T. L. Huston, 2000; Robins et al., 2002; Sturaro, Denissen, van Aken, & Asendorpf, 2008). Overall, however, longitudinal studies reliably indicate that personality traits appear to exert a stronger influence on relationship functioning than vice versa (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; B. W. Roberts & Mroczek, 2008) and that neuroticism in particular is a potent predictor of *future* relationship functioning and development (Caughlin et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Kelly & Conley, 1987).

This model is bolstered by behavioral genetic research demonstrating that both marital distress and divorce have significant heritability (McGue & Lykken, 1992; Spotts et al., 2005) and that this heritability appears to be mediated by genetically influenced personality traits such as negative affectivity (Jocklin, McGue, & Lykken, 1996; Spotts et al., 2005; Spotts et al., 2004). Importantly, recent research demonstrates that genetically influenced personality traits influence marital quality not only by shaping the individual's own experience of their relationship but also that of their partner (Spotts et al., 2005). In essence, the negative perceptions and behaviors of highly neurotic individuals make them difficult to live with, gradually eroding their own satisfaction and that of their partners.

Positive personality traits such as agreeableness, constraint, and general positive affectivity have also been linked to romantic relationships, although with less consistency than negative emotionality (Bouchard et al., 1999; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Robins et al., 2002; Watson et al., 2000). Some have argued that the effects of these positive traits might be attributable to the fact that such traits index an individual's general motivation to approach and pursue social rewards, which may lead him or her to interpret and approach close relationships with a more positive attitude (Simpson et al., 2006) and to become actively involved in maintaining and strengthening relationships through constructive behaviors such as accommodation (see especially the longitudinal research by Robins et al., 2000).

Dispositional optimism, too, appears to have beneficial effects. Several longitudinal studies have found associations between optimism and future marital quality, whereas current marital quality does not appear to make individuals more optimistic (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987b; Fincham, Bradbury et al., 1997). The beneficial effects of optimism appear to be mediated by the fact that optimism facilitates positive, relationship-enhancing attributions of (and sometimes "positive illusions" about) the partner's behavior (Bradbury et al., 1996; Fincham & Bradbury, 1988). For example, one longitudinal study (Srivastava et al., 2006) found that during conflict interactions, optimists perceived their partners as behaving more constructively during the conflict and consequently felt that the conflict was successfully resolved. One year later, optimists reported perceiving more support from their partner and, in turn, greater relationship satisfaction. In line with our "cascade" model of relationships and development over the life span, we might expect that over time, such processes should have progressively greater cumulative effects on both partners' interpersonal and psychological development, progressively enhancing their interpersonal skills (such as support provision and conflict negotiation), their confidence in one another's positive regard and motives, and their mutual commitment to, and security within, the relationship.

Self-Esteem

Individual differences in self-esteem have been shown to relate to individuals' expectations, attributions, and perceptions regarding their intimate relationships (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998). Individuals with low self-esteem tend to be particularly sensitive to the risks of social rejection (Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998), and hence to protect themselves from this risk, they tend to be hypervigilant to cues of a partner's negative affect or dissatisfaction (Bellavia & Murray, 2003) and quicker to anticipate impending rejection on this basis (Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). Also, individuals with low self-esteem allow global self-doubts to "bleed over" into relational doubts. Studies that have experimentally manipulated low-self-esteem individuals' doubts about their own intelligence found that they subsequently express greater concerns about rejection from their romantic partner (Murray et al., 1998). Perhaps most distressing is the fact that the relational doubts experienced by individuals with low self-esteem tend to become "self-fulfilling prophecies" by virtue of the maladaptive ways that these individuals respond to such doubts (Murray et al., 1998).

This was elegantly demonstrated by Murray and colleagues (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003) in a daily diary study of married couples. Individuals who felt less valued by their partners were disproportionately sensitive to any signs of negativity in their partner (even a partner's bad feelings about himself or herself), responding to these cues with heightened feelings of hurt and rejection. They subsequently displayed more cold, critical, and hurtful behaviors toward their partner (according to their own reports as well as the perceptions of their partner), which Murray and colleagues interpreted as a defensive attempt at "devaluing what they fear they might lose" (p. 137). The irony, of course, is that such behavior undermines the relationship itself, effectively *creating* the very rejection that individuals with low self-esteem so deeply fear. Similar dynamics have been observed among individuals with high levels of *rejection sensitivity* (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998), defined as a predisposition to fear social rejection, to be hypervigilant to signs of such potential rejection, and to be hyperreactive to the experience of rejection. Rejection-sensitive individuals—like those with low self-esteem—tend to behave toward romantic partners in ways that actually make rejection more likely, such as displaying heightened hostility and defensiveness upon perceiving the slightest cue of disapproval.

Although these pernicious self-fulfilling prophecies may prove most evident among individuals with low self-esteem or high rejection sensitivity, Murray and colleagues have argued that they pose a potential risk for *all* individuals, because close relationships always entail some risk of anxiety-provoking rejection (Murray, 2008; Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008). For this reason, they have argued that romantic relationships necessarily create a self-regulatory paradox: The more one seeks closeness, connection, and mutual dependence with a romantic partner, the more one stands to lose if the partner leaves. Every individual, therefore, faces a choice: pursuing intimacy and mutual dependence despite the risks of rejection or minimizing those risks by keeping the partner at a distance and reminding oneself of his or her shortcomings. Of course, the "catch" is that the latter approach might achieve the short-term aim of self-protection, but at the expense of undermining the relationship and making true intimacy impossible. They therefore posit that a sense of *felt security* in intimate relationships, representing an abiding certainty of the partner's positive regard—functions as a risk-regulation system, allowing individuals to set aside their fears of rejection and make the "leap of faith" that is necessary to pursue relationship-enhancing behaviors such as sacrifice, accommodation, trust, and mutual dependence (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

One intriguing but uninvestigated possibility is that individuals' willingness to make this leap of faith undergoes striking change over the life span, corresponding to developmental changes in individuals' needs and desires for supportive partners, their willingness to make themselves vulnerable, and their own sense of comfort in their shortcomings. For example, in late adolescence and early adulthood, individuals might tend to err on the side of self-protection, pursuing shorter term relationships that involve low levels of mutual dependence rather than taking the risk of deeper vulnerability and commitment. Yet as individuals move into adulthood, the trade-offs necessitated by self-protection are likely to become increasingly evident, and individuals may become more willing to risk rejection to achieve greater closeness and intimacy with a potential long-term partner. Similar developmental changes might occur and reoccur at multiple points over the life span (for example, after major life transitions such as having a child, divorce, or the death of a family member), whenever the perceived trade-offs between vulnerability and safety, loneliness versus companionship, and support versus self-reliance undergo change. Charting such developmental transitions, and how they interact with personality predispositions and relationship histories to shape individuals' ongoing approach to risk regulation over the life span, is a fascinating direction for future research.

Before leaving the topic of individual differences, it bears noting that the unique relationship dynamics observed among individuals with relatively extreme versions of a trait—chronically low self-esteem, high neuroticism, high rejection sensitivity—are not unique to such individuals. Rather, as shown by Murray and colleagues, they represent "extreme cases" of dynamics that are operative for all individuals. For example, even individuals with high self-esteem must keep fears of rejection at bay to achieve closeness and intimacy with their partners; they are simply more adept at this process than individuals with low self-esteem because of their higher threshold for perceived rejection. In a similar vein, the relationship hurdles faced by neurotic individuals provide a window into the potentially toxic repercussions of chronic negative affect among all individuals. In essence, the relationships of individuals who are particularly high or low on certain affective or motivational dimensions provide "natural experiments" that allow relationship researchers to understand the role of these various dimensions in current relationship satisfaction. Perhaps more important (albeit less often investigated), they allow researchers to understand how the effects of certain predispositions play out over life-span development, either

magnifying over time as individuals choose the same types of partners and engage in the same behaviors and cognitions again and again or dissipating if they find themselves in a relationship that breaks the old pattern and establishes a new trajectory for subsequent interpersonal and psychosocial development.

RELATIONSHIP THREATS

Jealousy

At all stages of the life course, individuals must contend with a variety of direct and indirect threats to the quality and stability of their intimate relationships. Jealousy is one of the most consistent and pernicious of these threats. Researchers have outlined two types of jealousy: *reactive* and *suspicious*. Both types are associated with feelings of hurt, anger, and fear (Bringle, 1995; Bringle & Buunk, 1991), but they have different antecedents and implications. Reactive jealousy occurs in response to a legitimate threat to the relationship, such as reliable evidence of a partner's infidelity. Suspicious jealousy, in contrast, occurs when one member of the dyad is worried about the partner's fidelity without any reasonable basis for this fear. The distinction is important, given that reactive jealousy is considered an adaptive response to a legitimate relationship threat, serving to motivate individuals to protect and preserve their relationship (Rydell & Bringle, 2007). In contrast, suspicious jealousy is considered maladaptive, serving only to undermine one's relationship by creating a climate of mistrust and paranoia. Of course, differentiating between these types of jealousy requires that one determines what "counts" as reasonable evidence of infidelity, and much research on jealousy treats both types somewhat generically.

Are there individual differences in propensities for jealousy? Overall, studies have found that individuals who feel unable to attract alternative partners report greater jealousy compared with people who feel they can attract many alternative partners (Knobloch, Solomon, & Cruz, 2001). Similarly, individuals who feel inadequate as a relationship partner and who have low self-worth in general tend to report more jealousy (DeSteno, Valdesolo, & Bartlett, 2006). Not surprisingly, attachment anxiety has also been shown to be associated with excessive jealousy (Guerrero, 1998), consistent with the fact that one of the fundamental characteristics of attachment anxiety is heightened concern over the availability and responsiveness of the partner and heightened fears of abandonment (Buunk, 1997).

Evolutionary theorists have focused particular attention on gender differences in jealousy, arguing that such differences arise from the fact that females and males faced different reproductive challenges in the environment of evolutionary adaptedness. According to sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), a man should be primarily distressed by sexual jealousy, because his reproductive success is maximized by inseminating many women and is directly threatened if a female partner engages in sexual contact with another man (casting doubt on whether he is the father of her offspring). A woman, in contrast, should be primarily distressed by *emotional* jealousy, because her reproductive success is maximized by investing heavily in the survival of each of her children (unlike men, women do not have the option of producing large numbers of offspring, making it critical for them to ensure the survival of each one). According to this model, a woman's reproductive success is maximized if she can secure the resources and investment of her male partner but threatened if her partner withdraws these precious resources and invests them in someone else. Harris (2000, 2003) has referred to this set of predictions as the *JSIM* or "jealousy as a specific innate module" effect, because it purports an evolved, genetically based, sex-specific psychological "module" for the detection of threats to one's reproductive success.

Numerous social-psychological studies have been conducted to test the existence, magnitude, and context of these predicted gender differences in sexual versus emotional jealousy. In early studies that simply asked men and women which type of infidelity they found most troubling, the results confirmed the predictions of sexual strategies theory (Buss, Larsen, Westen, & Semmelroth, 1992; Buss et al., 1999; Buunk, Angleitner, Oubaid, & Buss, 1996). Yet studies using different methodologies and samples (particularly samples that do not comprise undergraduate students) often fail to replicate the effect (reviewed in DeSteno, Bartlett, Braverman, & Salovey, 2002; Harris, 2000; Sabini & Green, 2004) One well-known critique of the JSIM effect is the *double-shot hypothesis* (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Harris & Christenfeld, 1996), which maintains that women are more distressed by emotional jealousy because they presume that if a man became emotionally involved with another woman, he would almost certainly become sexually involved with her as well (thereby providing a "double shot" of infidelity), whereas men are more distressed by sexual jealousy because they presume that if a woman became sexually involved with another man, she would probably become emotionally involved with him as well (also thereby providing a double shot). Additionally, recent work by Sabini and Green (2004) has failed to confirm a key tenet of the JSIM hypothesis—namely, that women have a greater fear of resource withdrawal from men who are emotionally involved with another woman than from men who are sexually involved with another woman. Sabini and Green concluded that the JSIM effect is "replicable but not robust" (p. 1385). Also, variation in the findings regarding the JSIM effect across diverse samples has been interpreted to suggest that in some cases, the JSIM may reflect local norms rather than an innate evolved and universal "jealousy module."

Of course, a notable shortcoming of this body of research is the utter lack of a developmental perspective. Even if we set aside a strict evolutionary perspective and side with the double-shot hypothesis, it bears noting that this framework assumes that everyone "knows" what men and women tend to want and to do in intimate relationships (i.e., that men are unlikely to engage in "purely emotional" infidelity and that women are unlikely to pursue "purely sexual" infidelity). Yet where does this knowledge come from? The unstated assumption is that it develops through men's and women's direct experiences as participants in—and observers of—intimate relationships. However, this process ought to take a significant amount of time and progressive experience, in which case gender differences in sexual versus emotional jealousy should become progressively more pronounced over the life course and might not even be discernible at the very beginning of adolescents' romantic trajectories. Such developmental differences would provide strong evidence that social learning plays a stronger role in these gender differences than evolved jealousy modules, yet at the present time, such developmentally oriented investigations have not been undertaken.

Infidelity

The prevalence of infidelity at different stages of the life course and different points in the development of a single relationship has generated considerable scientific and popular interest over the years. Although it is difficult to gather accurate data on this question because of the social unacceptability of infidelity, certain reliable patterns have emerged: Infidelity appears substantially more common in young adults' dating relationships than in older couples' married relationships. For example, in a study of American college students, two thirds of males and half of females reported they had kissed and fondled someone other than their current romantic partner, and half of men and one third of women reported having had intercourse with someone other than their partner (Widmer, Treas, & Newcomb, 1998). Such statistics decrease dramatically among adult married couples. The vast majority of husbands and wives never have sex with someone other than their spouse after they marry; among those who have, males report higher rates of infidelity than females, at an average rate of 25% among men and 15% among women (Laumann et al., 1994). In addition to gender differences in the prevalence of infidelity, men's and women's motives for infidelity differ, with men more likely to report that sexual variety was their primary motive and women more likely to report that emotional connectedness was their primary motive (Blow & Hartnett, 2005).

Numerous studies have attempted to determine whether there are stable individual differences that characterize individuals "at risk" for infidelity. The findings suggest that individuals who have engaged in infidelity tend to have lower levels of mental well-being, greater attachment insecurity, greater narcissism, and more permissive attitudes regarding casual sex (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buunk, 1997; Gangestad & Thornhill, 2003; Sheppard, Nelson, & Andreoli-Mathie, 1995; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991; Treas & Giesen, 2000). As for relationship characteristics, individuals with low levels of commitment to their current partner have higher rates of infidelity as well as greater reported willingness to engage in infidelity (Buunk & Bakker, 1997; Drigotas, Safstrom, et al., 1999; Treas & Giesen, 2000). Particularly among women, emotional dissatisfaction with the primary relationship is associated with greater infidelity (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Prins, Buunk, & VanYperen, 1993). The detrimental effects of infidelity appear to cut across gender: Around the world, infidelity is a primary cause of divorce (Betzig, 1989; Buss, 1994) particularly when dissatisfaction with their primary relationship is one of the triggers or justifications for the extramarital affair (Buunk, 1987; Spanier & Margolis, 1983).

Of course, the very notion of infidelity depends on the assumption that a successful committed relationship must be monogamous. Since the sexual revolution of the 1970s, many individuals and groups have challenged this notion and attempted to maintain "open" or "polyamorous" relationships (Bettinger, 2006; Rust, 1996; Sheff, 2005). Polyamory has increasingly garnered the attention of social scientists, yet its prevalence is impossible to estimate given that all studies of polyamorous individuals have involved nonrandom samples. Individuals who practice polyamory are diverse in their sexual orientations, including heterosexuals, bisexuals, lesbians, and gay men

(Weitzman, 2006), but there is some indication that among nonheterosexual individuals, bisexuals are more likely to practice polyamory than lesbians or gay men (Rust, 1996), perhaps because the process of questioning restrictive cultural standards regarding the authenticity of bisexual attractions prompts such individuals to question cultural standards regarding the supposed moral and psychological preeminence of monogamy.

Labriola (1999) identified three models for polyamorous relationships: the primary–secondary model, the multiple primary partners model, and the multiple nonprimary relationships model. Research to date indicates that the *primary–secondary model*, also known as hierarchical polyamory, is the most prevalent, at least among bisexuals and lesbians (Labriola, 1999; Rust, 1996; Weitzman, 2006). In this model, a couple views their relationship with each other as their "primary" bond and devote the majority of their time, energy, and loyalty to this bond but remain open to additional lovers (Weitzman, 2006). In the *multiple primary partners model*, an individual might have two partners, each of which is considered to be of equal importance. In some cases, the two partners will also be involved with one another, thereby establishing a triadic relationship (Rust, 1996). Some of these arrangements are "open," meaning that all of the participants are free to enter into other relationships, and some are closed.

Polyamorous relationships clearly pose fundamental challenges to many of our established notions about the nature and functioning of romantic relationships, all of which are based on an assumption of monogamy (Ritchie & Barker, 2006). They also require different models and terminologies regarding relational commitment and relational maintenance. For example, although "attention to attractive alternatives" is considered a key factor potentially undermining commitment in the context of a conventional monogamous couple, within polyamorous arrangements the "attractive alternative" of the secondary partner poses no such threat (at least not in theory). The degree to which it is necessary to modify existing models of relationship functioning to accommodate polyamorous relationships versus jettisoning monogamous models altogether and developing new frameworks for understanding polyamorous arrangements is not yet clear and is an important question for future research. Additionally, given that polyamory remains highly stigmatized, invisible, and misunderstood, the strategies through which polyamorous individuals preserve a sense of identity, community, and well-being is a critical area for research (Barker, 2005). Investigating the cognitive, affective, psychological, and behavioral processes through which individuals maintain these unconventional arrangements and whether polyamory poses different challenges at different stages of the life span can address a arrange of fascinating, fundamental questions about the nature of adult sexual-romantic bonding.

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Intimate partner violence has been increasingly acknowledged as a major public health concern threatening the well-being of women and men over the life span (Black & Breiding, 2008; Lamberg, 2000). A study of more than 16,000 men and women conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 22% of women and 7% of men reported having experienced a violent physical assault by an intimate partner (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), and other surveys have reported that one in every six couples experience some form of physical violence in their relationship (Williams & Frieze, 2005). Rates of nonphysical forms of aggression, such as screaming at or ridiculing one's partners, are substantially more common (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005), although typically viewed as less serious than physical violence (Capezza & Arriaga, 2008). Notably, however, studies have found that verbal aggression shows the same patterns of association with individual-level mental health problems and couple-level power dynamics as does physical violence (Sagrestano, Heavey, & Christensen, 1999; South, Turkheimer, & Oltmanns, 2008), suggesting the importance of systematically assessing both physical and nonphysical violence. Nonetheless, the majority of research on intimate partner violence focuses on physical violence, and our review necessarily reflects this orientation in the literature. Hence, the generic term *violence* should be interpreted to denote physical violence unless noted otherwise.

The most common forms of physical violence appear to be mild manifestations of violence (pushing, grabbing, shoving) perpetrated by both partners against one another (Williams & Frieze, 2005). The high prevalence of *mutual* physical violence runs counter to longstanding stereotypes portraying men as the exclusive perpetrators of violence against their female partners. It is now well documented that women and men participate in comparable levels of relationship violence (Archer, 2000), although the context, correlates, and consequences of their violence remain distinct. For example, women engage in less severe forms of physical violence than do men (kicking and punching vs. choking and strangling) and are less likely to inflict serious injury on their partner (Archer, 2000).

Also, some research suggests that women are less likely than men to *initiate* violence and that they tend to aggress against their partners in defense and retaliation for violence directed at them, a pattern called *violent resistance* (M. P. Johnson, 2006). Others, however, have argued that women initiate violence just as frequently as men (Hettrich & O'Leary, 2007). There is insufficient empirical data to determine which view is more accurate, given that few studies (or police officers, or social workers) take pains to establish which partner initiated an episode of mutual violence. Furthermore, both partners are often motivated by self-presentation concerns to portray their partner as the instigator. Johnson (2006) argued that the defining characteristic of violent resistance is that the resisting partner is violent but not controlling, whereas the initiating partner is both violent and controlling. Hence, accurately assessing gender differences in violent resistance requires more than simply finding out "who started it" but understanding the entire psychological and dyadic context of the violence.

This emphasis on the larger psychological and dyadic context of partner violence arguably represents one of the most substantive recent changes in research on intimate partner violence. As Johnson summarized, "personal relationship violence *arises out of and shapes* the dynamics of an ongoing relationship" (2006, p. 557, emphasis added). This perspective represents a departure from much of the early research on intimate partner violence, which was based primarily on couples sampled from clinics, courts, and domestic violence agencies (M. P. Johnson, 2006; Williams & Frieze, 2005) and which inadvertently bolstered a stereotype portraying partner violence as attributable to domineering, pathological husbands exerting dictatorial control over their wives. To be sure, such couples do exist, but they represent only one potential form of partner violence. Researchers now distinguish between *intimate terrorism*, in which the perpetrator uses violence to assert systematic control over his or her partner (Kirkwood, 1993; Pence & Paymar, 1993), and *situational couple violence*, in which high levels of anger, tension, and emotion in a particular interaction escalate into violence, often unexpectedly.

Because situational couple violence is often milder, less frequent, and less regularized than intimate terrorism, couples who experience these forms of violence are rarely represented in the court, clinic, and agency samples on which so much early work on intimate partner violence was based (M. P. Johnson, 2006). As researchers have increasingly conducted research using broad-based community samples and representative national surveys, it has become clear that minor and major forms of situational couple violence are extremely common across a wide range of relationships, including short-term dating relationships and even the fledgling romances of adolescents (Burcky, Reuterman, & Kopsky, 1988; Foshee, Benefield, Ennett, Bauman, & Suchindran, 2004; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; M. P. Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Silverman, Raj, Mucci, & Hathaway, 2001; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989; Wekerle & Wolfe, 1999; Wolf & Foshee, 2003). Data collected as a part of the Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Surveys paint an alarming picture of adolescent violence: Approximately 20% of girls between the ages of 14 and 18 reported being physically or sexually abused by a dating partner, and these girls were more likely to report substance use, sexual risk behaviors, pregnancy, and suicidality (Silverman et al., 2001).

Such studies demonstrate that partner violence is not the purview of a small group of pathological, domineering men but a potential outcome in any relationship, at any stage in its development. All individuals experience the angry and aggressive impulses that provide the potential trigger for a violent outburst, demonstrated by the frequency with which individuals report threatening and screaming at their partners during conflicts (Fergusson et al., 2005). The basic emotions that motivate someone to publicly humiliate their partner in a fit of anger appear to be exactly the same as those that motivate physical aggression: The question, then, is not which types of *people* aggress against their partner but what *constellations* of individual, interpersonal and situational factors give rise to different forms and degrees of violence in intimate relationships?

Understanding Partner Violence

Toward this end, Finkel (2007, 2008) proposed an organizing framework to understand the antecedents of situational couple violence. He modeled such violence as the function of three interacting influences: *instigating triggers, impelling influences*, and *inhibiting influences*. Instigating triggers represent circumstances or conditions that give rise to anger and frustration, such as a bad mood or a particularly difficult conflict. Once the instigating trigger has been activated, the balance between impelling and inhibiting influences moderates the risk for actual violence. These influences include distal factors such as cultural

and community norms regarding gender and power and family histories of violence (Archer, 2006; Arriaga & Foshee, 2004; F. M. Hughes, Stuart, Gordon, & Moore, 2007); dispositional factors such as neuroticism, hostility, anger expression style, and self-regulation (Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008; Jensen-Campbell, Knack, Waldrip, & Campbell, 2007; Wolf & Foshee, 2003); relational factors such as present relationship distress, degree of commitment, and conflict resolution strategies (Gottman, 1993; M. P. Johnson & Ferraro, 2000; Simpson, Collins, Tran, & Haydon, 2007); and situational factors such as whether the couples is alone and whether weapons are available. One of the key strengths of this approach is that it provides a way to organize and interpret systematically the voluminous data on predictors of partner violence, which include everything from alcohol use to job loss to childhood sexual abuse (Flett & Hewett, 2002; Gelles & Loseke, 1993; Jasinski & Williams, 1998; M. P. Johnson, 2006; Stith et al., 2000; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Sugarman, Aldarondo, & Boney-McCoy, 1996), and to make sense of the fact that the key predictors may vary markedly between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence (M. P. Johnson, 2006).

Now that researchers have adopted a broader and more comprehensive approach to investigating partner violence, new and intriguing questions have emerged regarding the potentially distinct developmental pathways through which men and women come to violent relationships, the differential impacts of certain forms of violence on men and women (Anderson, 2002; Katz, Kuffel, & Coblentz, 2002; Stith et al., 2000; Sugarman et al., 1996), and the factors that differentiate mutual violence from one-sided violence, regarding both its antecedents and its consequences (Swan & Snow, 2003). For example, in data collected from more than 3,500 respondents to the National Comorbidity Survey, Williams and Frieze (2005) found that more than half of the reported violence was mutual, and women were actually more likely to admit perpetrating violence than men. Among both men and women, the most common pattern of partner violence—mild mutual violence—was significantly associated with high levels of distress and low levels of relationship satisfaction in both men and women. Yet when all forms of violence were taken into account (mild and severe; mutual and nonmutual), violence was more strongly related to women's psychosocial outcomes then men's, consistent with much prior research (reviewed in Williams & Frieze, 2005). As Johnson (2006) argued, to interpret such patterns we must understand violence *as a property of an ongoing relationship* and seek to understand the specific dynamics between a couple that shape the antecedents, manifestations, and consequences of violence at different stages of the relationship and the life course.

Reconsidering Gender: Violence in Same-Sex Relationships

Researchers have increasingly investigated partner violence in same-sex couples to better understand the specific role played by gender in shaping violent couple dynamics. Contrary to the notion that partner violence is unique to the patriarchal dynamics of male–female pairings, studies have documented a wide range of violence and abuse within same-sex relationships, ranging from physical behaviors such as hitting, slapping, scratching, and attacking with a weapon, to nonphysical behaviors such as threats, denigration, and sexual coercion (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; Regan, Bartholomew, Oram, & Landolt, 2002; Walder-Haugrud, 1999; West, 1998, 2002). Although accurate prevalence estimates are difficult to obtain, prior studies have found incidence rates ranging from 25% to 50% (Alexander, 2002; West, 2002). Notably, sexual-minority adolescents are not immune from these problems: Elze (2002) found that one-third of female sexual-minority youths in northern England had experienced verbal or physical abuse in their dating relationships in the previous 12 months, including 28% of the girls who had *only* dated other girls.

Thus far, studies have found that the triggers for relationship violence in same-sex couples parallel those found in heterosexual couples, such as conflicts over dependency, jealousy, money, power, and substance abuse (McClennen, Summers, & Vaughan, 2002). Some unique patterns, however, have emerged. For example, one study of gay male couples (Regan et al., 2002) found that some forms of violence that typically occupy the upper end of the severity continuum for heterosexual couples, such as punching and hitting, tended to cluster with lower severity violent behaviors among gay male couples. Alternatively, some behaviors that are lower in severity for heterosexual couples, such as twisting arms, pulling hair, and scratching, cluster with higher severity violent behaviors among gay men. The authors suggested that men might resort to punching and hitting earlier in a male–male conflict than in a male–female conflict, given that this behavior has more serious consequences when directed toward a weaker and smaller woman (and also potentially because some boys become accustomed to hitting and punching other boys in the context of childhood fights). With regard to hair pulling and scratching, they argued that these behaviors in gay male couples might index the escalation of a fight to a prolonged, close-proximity struggle. Unique dynamics have also been observed in lesbian couples. For example, one recent study (D. H. Miller, Greene, Causby, White, & Lockhart, 2001) found that physical aggression was more common than outright violence in lesbian relationships and that it was best predicted by relationship fusion, whereas physical violence was best predicted by measures of control. Such findings raise important questions about how male and female socialization, as well as males' and females' different developmental histories of physically aggressive conflicts, relates to the patterns of violence and abuse observed in male–female, male–male, and female–female couples.

Understanding such dynamics is critically important for the design and implementation of effective antiviolence interventions. For example, given that the majority of domestic violence in heterosexual relationships is conducted by males, the training of clinicians and social workers may be inadequate to address the factors underlying female relationship violence. Additionally, it is important to consider whether sexual-minority relationships might be particularly vulnerable to relationship violence as a function of the stress and pressure of social stigmatization or maladaptive patterns of social functioning derived from histories of parental or peer rejection or victimization. Such information might prove to be particularly important in preventing sexual-minority youths from developing stable, maladaptive patterns of dealing with social stigma and with relationship problems (Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, & Reyes, 1991).

WHEN ALL EFFORTS FAIL: DIVORCE

In the 1960s, approximately 30% of U.S. marriages ended in divorce. This figure increased to a little over 50% by the mid-1970s and has stayed relatively stable ever since (Bramlet & Mosher, 2002). Divorce has been consistently rated as one of life's most stressful events (Kendler, Karkowski, & Prescott, 1999), and studies have found that divorced individuals have higher risks for a variety of mental and physical health problems over the life span (Booth & Amato, 1991; Braver, Shapiro, & Goodman, 2006; Coombs, 1991; Mastekaasa, 1994; Ross, 1995; Waite, 1995). The reasons for this robust association, however, remain widely debated. On one hand, the short- and long-term stress that people typically experience as a result of getting divorced is thought to confer mental health risks (Booth & Amato, 1991; Ross, 1995); on the other hand, people who end up getting divorced might have always been different "types" of people, with personality traits (such as neuroticism) and interpersonal skill deficits that predispose them to troublesome relationships as well as longstanding adjustment problems (Aseltine & Kessler, 1993; Avison, 1999; Ceglian & Gardner, 1999; Jocklin, McGue, & Lykken, 1996; D. R. Johnson & Wu, 2002; Lucas, 2005; B. W. Roberts et al., 2007). These two models have notably different implications for life-span development: If the negative mental health correlates of divorce are attributable to divorce-related stress, then they should dissipate over time as the acute stress of the transition gradually dissipates. If, on the other hand, they are attributable to the individual's own long-standing psychosocial problems, then they should persist long after the divorce and should have similarly negative effects on the individual's subsequent relationships.

Studies suggest that both perspectives are partly true; certain temperamental traits and family backgrounds do, in fact, appear to predispose certain individuals for troublesome relationships and, by extension, divorce (Jocklin et al., 1996; Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Longitudinal studies have found that individuals who eventually divorce typically begin to show elevations in generalized distress long before the divorce itself, often due to longstanding relationship dysfunction (Hope, Rodgers, & Power, 1999; D. R. Johnson & Booth, 1998). For these individuals, the stress of divorce may have added to their difficulties but did not create them.

Yet the majority of studies also show that the stress of divorce poses considerable adjustment challenges that have equal (and often greater) influences on adjustment than individuals' preexisting vulnerabilities (D. R. Johnson & Wu, 2002). Although many individuals do, in fact, end up better off by leaving a distressing marriage, the trajectory of adjustment is a long one, and some individuals never attain predivorce levels of happiness and well-being (Lucas, 2005). This overall pattern of results strongly supports the first two developmental premises that we have emphasized throughout this chapter: that relationships simultaneously function as "outputs" of longstanding developmental processes and "inputs" for subsequent development. We might therefore view divorce as a likely outcome for individuals with long-standing developmental deficits in psychosocial and interpersonal functioning, including emotion regulation, empathy, and communication. At the same time, divorce also represents the failure

of an intimate relationship to provide a safe context for the repair of these developmental deficits, the retraining of social cognitions and behaviors, and finally a redirection of the individual's long-term trajectory of psychological and interpersonal development.

Why is it, however, that some couples manage to achieve this repair and retraining, whereas others do not? In trying to answer this question, many researchers have followed Karney and Bradbury's lead (1995) in focusing on the complex interactions among individual-level risk factors for divorce, the interpersonal processes in which these risks are made manifest (Carrère et al., 2000; Driver et al., 2003; Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000, 2002), and the contexts in which maladaptive processes are most likely to take root and to eventually erode the marital bond (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Mastekaasa, 1995; Neff & Karney, 2004).

Vulnerability, Stress, and Adaptation

Karney and Bradbury (1995) called their model a *vulnerability–stress–adaptation* model, and it highlights three sets of factors that coordinate to influence a couples' risk for divorce: partners' *enduring vulnerabilities* (ranging from neuroticism to a familial history of divorce to attachment insecurity), *adaptive and maladaptive processes* (including behavioral factors such as communication and conflict resolution as well as cognitive factors such as attributions), and *stressful events* (such as income loss, job transitions, new parenthood, or any stressor that potentially places a burden on a couple's coping resources). This model is best conceived as a model of general marital functioning, rather than divorce specifically, yet one of its strengths when applied specifically to divorce is that it helps to reconcile the fact that there is such extensive agreement among researchers on the key predictors of divorce, albeit disagreement regarding the relative importance of different types of predictors. From the perspective of Karney and Bradbury's model, this is to be expected. Because vulnerabilities, adaptational processes, and stressors interact with one another dynamically over time to influence marital outcomes, it is impossible to designate one domain as causally prior or central.

Additional Sociodemographic Predictors of Divorce

Given that Karney and Bradbury's model highlights the importance of contextual factors that create potential sources of stress for couples, it is useful to review some of the most reliable sociodemographic predictors of divorce from the vulnerability–stress–adaptation perspective. For example, couples with lower household incomes have higher rates of divorce (e.g., see Kurdek, 1993b). This makes perfect sense when considering the stress introduced by economic problems, but notably, recent research has suggested that the link between economic strain and divorce is moderated by the economic dependency of the female partner. Specifically, couples in which the female partner is economically dependent on the male partner have lower risks for divorce (Rogers, 2004), which has been attributed to the fact that women may "settle" for a dissatisfying marriage if they perceive that divorce would place them (and potentially their children) in financial jeopardy. In contrast, women with independent financial resources are better able to make decisions about divorce that are based exclusively on psychological rather than material concerns. The material concerns can be quite significant, given that women's standard of living typically declines precipitously after divorcing, whereas men's typically improves (Sayer, 2006). Another important moderator of the link between household income and divorce is the couple's overall financial state. Although all couples tend to argue about money (Kirchler, Rodler, Hölzl, & Meier, 2001; Sayer, 2006; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2005), the stakes of these arguments are obviously higher among low-income couples than high-income couples, necessarily changing the relative importance of financial stress in the constellation of factors predicting relationship dissolution. Accordingly, couples from lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to blame their marital difficulties on money problems than on interpersonal factors, whereas couples from higher socioeconomic groups show the opposite pattern (Amato & Previti, 2003; Rodrigues, Hall, & Fincham, 2006).

Educational level is also inversely related to the probability of divorce (Kurdek, 1993b; Orbuch, Veroff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002). To some extent, this association is attributable to the link between educational level and socioeconomic status (Orbuch, Verloff, Hassan, & Horrocks, 2002; Rodrigues et al., 2006). However, researchers have noted that low educational attainment may also be associated with divorce through its association with a range of other individual-level characteristics, such as problem behavior, jealousy, and infidelity (Amato & Rogers, 1997). Also, similar to the findings noted earlier regarding the female partner's economic dependence on her husband, women with higher levels of education than their husbands are more likely to divorce (Heaton, 2002), likely reflecting their greater range of postdivorce economic and social options.

Another intriguing sociodemographic predictor of divorce is age. Couples who marry at younger ages—especially under age 25—have higher risks for divorce (Heaton, 2002). Interpreting this association requires attention to all three dimensions in Karney and Bradbury's model. First, given that the age of first marriage has been increasing over the past several decades (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005), men and women who currently marry young can be viewed as "self-selecting" themselves into early marriage, potentially as a function of vulnerabilities such as impulsivity, emotional problems, low educational attainment, jealousy, substance use, and parental history of divorce—all of these factors also make such individuals more susceptible to marital problems (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Wallerstein, Corbin, Lewis, Hetherington, & Arasteh, 1988). Young couples are also likely to face greater financial strain than older couples, given that the contemporary economy requires more protracted education and job training to secure a secure, high-paying job (Booth, Crouter, & Shanahan, 1999; Furstenberg, Kennedy, Mcloyd, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2004). Hence, the combination of individual-level vulnerabilities and contextual stressors may markedly increase young couples' risks for marital dysfunction and dissolution, especially if they also tend to develop maladaptive patterns of communication and conflict resolution early on in their relationship (Carrère et al., 2000; Gottman, 1993, 1994).

Cohabitation: Why Does It Confer Risk?

Another widely investigated predictor of divorce is premarital cohabitation. Rates of cohabitation have increased dramatically over the past several decades. In 1960, there were approximately 400,000 heterosexual cohabiting couples in the United States, compared with nearly 5 million currently (Seltzer, 2004). The specific pattern of cohabiting before marriage has also increased: Between 1965 and 1974, approximately 10% of couples cohabited before marriage, compared with more than 50% among those marrying between 1990 and 1994 (Bumpass & Lu, 2000; Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). Contrary to the popular belief that cohabitation gives couples the chance to "prepare" for married life (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 2001), studies have consistently found that couples who cohabitate before marriage have higher divorce rates after marriage, with the exception of couples who enter into cohabitation with the distinct intention to marry (Kline et al., 2004; Stafford, Kline, & Rankin, 2004). In explaining this seemingly counterintuitive finding, researchers have proposed that a couple's choice to cohabit rather than marry may reflect one or both partners' ambivalence about committing to the relationship, a generalized acceptance of untraditional relationships, and a greater psychological tolerance for divorce (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988; Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004). From this perspective, cohabitation does not necessarily lead to divorce; rather, couples who elect to cohabit have higher probabilities of divorce to begin with (reviewed in Dush, Cohan, & Amato, 2003).

Research suggests that selection effects do, in fact, account for some of the association between cohabitation and divorce (Lillard, Brian, & Waite, 1995; Thomson & Colella, 1992), but not entirely. Some research suggests that the experience of cohabitation might confer additional risk to such couples, potentially by undermining their attitudes toward marriage and their determination to make a relationship work (Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Dush et al., 2003; McGinnis, 2003). This notion is consistent with research demonstrating that cohabiting couples become progressively less likely to marry (but no less likely to break up) the longer that they cohabit, whereas married couples become progressively less likely to break up the longer that they have been married (Wolfinger, 2005). Also, if selection effects were entirely attributable for the link between cohabitation and divorce, then this association should become progressively weaker over time, as overall rates of cohabitation increase and cohabitation becomes a more normative component of young adults' relationship trajectories. To test this hypothesis, Dush and colleagues (2003) compared two U.S. marriage cohorts: those married between 1964 and 1980 and those married between 1981 and 1997. They found that after controlling for self-selection factors such as income, education, history of parental divorce, and whether a marriage was a first or second marriage, couples who cohabited before marriage had significantly poorer marital functioning and lower marital happiness in both cohorts, and these associations did not significantly vary across cohorts.

This surprising finding highlights how little is known about the subjective meaning and phenomenology of marriage versus cohabitation within the long-range developmental trajectory of an established couple and the

conditions under which that subjective meaning might change over time as couples traverse different stages in their own respective life spans and also the life span of their relationship. Clearly, this is an area in which we need longitudinal, qualitative research to investigate the potentially nonconscious processes through which cohabiting couples' intentions regarding marriage and other major relationship decisions gradually change over time.

RELATIONSHIPS, HEALTH, AND PSYCHOBIOLOGY

One of the most robust findings to emerge from health psychology since the 1980s is that individuals in enduring, committed romantic relationships have longer, healthier, and happier lives than unmarried individuals (Cheung, 1998; Horwitz, McLaughlin, & White, 1998; Mastekaasa, 1994; Murphy, Glaser, & Grundy, 1997; Ross, 1995; Ryff, Singer, Wing, & Love, 2001; Stack, 1998; Stack & Eshleman, 1998). This effect cannot be attributed to overall social integration, given that individuals' most intimate relationships appear to promote health and well-being above and beyond generalized social support (Ross, 1995; Ryff et al., 2001). Rather, the key variable appears to be the long-term maintenance of an enduring, emotionally intimate affectional bond (Ross, 1995). For example, simply knowing whether an individual "feels loved" significantly predicts his or her future cardiovascular disease risk (Seeman & Syme, 1987).

The task now is to determine how these linkages develop, the conditions under which they are established and maintained, the specific psychological and physiological processes involved, and their long-term implications for health and well-being. Much of the existing psychobiological research on these questions implicitly or explicitly draws on models of cumulative biopsychosocial adversity and advantage (for example, Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002; Ryff et al., 2001; Seeman, 2001). Such models explain the long-term health consequences of interpersonal relationships as a function of the cumulative impact of positive and negative relationship experiences on physiological processes related to stress regulation. This theoretical framework is based on the extensive body of research demonstrating that the positive and negative emotions elicited within intimate relationships are primary pathways through which day-to-day relationship experiences influence health-related physiological processes over the life span, such as cardiovascular and neuroendocrine functioning (Cacioppo et al., 2003; Kiecolt-Glaser, McGuire, Robles, & Glaser, 2002; Ryff et al., 2001).

Many studies testing this model have focused on identifying the immediate effects of discrete relationship events (such as conflict, problem solving, provision of support) on physiological functioning, most commonly activity in the autonomic nervous system (assessed through heart rate, blood pressure, electrodermal activity, respiratory sinus arrhythmia), the immune system (assessed through immune lymphocytes and pro-inflammatory cytokines), and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenocortical (HPA) axis of the endocrine system (assessed via salivary cortisol). By understanding how an individual's body responds to a single hostile interaction with their partner, we can make inferences about how long-term participation in a hostile marriage might expose an individual to chronic psychophysiological stress that takes a progressively greater toll on their health over the life span. In addition, models of cumulative adversity also take into account the possibility that for some individuals, the state of being exposed to aversive marital interactions on a day-to-day basis might give rise to "habits" of physiological reactivity that come to characterizes individuals' responses to stress more generally and place them at risk for the gradual accumulation of detrimental "wear and tear" on stress-regulatory systems or the course of many years (Lupien et al., 2006; Marin, Martin, Blackwell, Stetler, & Miller, 2007; G. E. Miller, Chen, & Zhou, 2007; Seeman & Gruenewald, 2006; Seeman, Singer, Ryff, Dienberg Love, & Levy-Storms, 2002).

Importantly, such patterns are known to be moderated by individual differences in physiological functioning that have been found to be linked to individual differences in emotion regulation (reviewed in Diamond & Hicks, 2004). For example, individuals who are already predisposed to heightened cardiovascular reactivity in response to stress might be especially reactive to marital conflict, exposing them to heightened physical risks over the long-term course of a lasting marriage. Alternatively, such individuals may not benefit as much as low-reactive individuals from the potentially stress-buffering effects of support and nurturance. Understanding such complex links between person-level and situation-level factors in explaining the links between relationships and health is a priority for life-span/developmental research in this area. In reviewing some of the major findings here, space precludes us from providing a comprehensive introduction and review of each of the physiological systems discussed; we refer

the reader to the excellent reviews of these systems, and of methodologies for measuring them, that can be found elsewhere (Cacioppo, Tassinary, & Berntson, 2000; Diamond & Otter-Henderson, 2007; Loving, Heffner, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006).

Reactivity to Marital Interactions

Direct evidence for associations between marital interactions and physiological processes has been found in a variety of experimental studies. In some cases, the primary effects concern global properties of the relationship, and in others, the primary effects concern characteristics of the immediate interaction. Examples of the latter include research by Ewart, Taylor, Kraemer, and Agras (1991), which found that hostile behavior during a 10-minute spousal discussion was associated with significant elevations in women's blood pressure. Similarly, Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues found that wives with a pattern of negative escalation during conflict showed concurrent changes in cortisol, adrenocorticotropic hormone, and norepinephrine (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1997), Notably, women also appear particularly reactive to their partners' behavior, showing heightened endocrine and immunological reactivity to male withdrawal during conflict discussions (Heffner et al., 2006; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1996). The tendency for women to show greater physiological reactivity than their male partners to conflict discussions—especially in response to a partner's negative behavior—has emerged across numerous studies (Dopp, Miller, Myers, & Fahey, 2000; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Mayne, O'Leary, McCrady, & Contrada, 1997) and stands in notable contrast to the fact that men tend to show greater physiological reactivity to general laboratory stressors (Earle, Linden, & Weinberg, 1999; Kirschbaum, Wust, & Hellhammer, 1992). Such patterns suggest intriguing gender differences in the ways that men and women approach marital conflict and have important implications for understanding why men and women show different patterns of association between relationship status and physical health over the life span, a topic addressed in greater detail later.

Other studies have investigated associations between physiological reactivity and partners' *global* assessments of relationship functioning. For example, Broadwell and Light (1999) investigated spouses' blood pressure during conflictual and nonconflictual interactions. They found lower levels of vascular resistance during both types of interactions (as well as during the resting baseline) among spouses who reported high levels of overall family support. Similarly, Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Loving, Glaser, and Malarkey (2004) found lower levels of cortisol reactivity in response to marital conflict among spouses who were generally satisfied with the type of support they received from their partners. Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues (1997) found that spouses who described their marital disagreements as highly negative (and who displayed more negative conflict behavior in the laboratory) showed poor immunological responses, suggesting increased risk for suppressed immune functioning in response to chronic strain and stress. One particularly intriguing study (Kiecolt-Glaser, Bane, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2003) examined whether the patterns of physiological response that wives and husbands showed during a laboratory problem-solving interaction were predictive of relationship dissolution 10 years later. They found that couples who eventually divorced, as well as couples who stayed together but reported notable dissatisfaction, had shown significantly higher rates of epinephrine and norepinephrine during both the laboratory problem-solving discussion as well as during the ensuing day and night, at home. The authors suggested that their results provide insight into the types of physiological and emotional responses that might accompany maladaptive forms of conflict on a day-to-day level, even outside of conscious awareness, and that exert powerful cumulative effects on each partner's health over the life span.

It is important to note that most of the research on associations between romantic relationship dimensions and physiological reactivity has focused on negative rather than positive behaviors and emotions (with some exceptions, such as Ewart et al., 1991; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1996; Robles, Shaffer, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006). This may appear to be out of balance, given the extensive evidence for the independent importance of positive behaviors and emotions for marital functioning (Carstensen et al., 2004; Heyman, Weiss, & Eddy, 1995). Yet overall, negative behaviors appear to show stronger patterns of association with physiological reactivity than positive behaviors (Ewart, 1993). Of course, positive and negative behaviors often occur in dynamic interaction with one another over the course of a single interaction, or the long-term course of a well-established relationship, and in many cases it may be the sequence, coordination, and mutual regulation of partners' positive and negative moods and behaviors that proves significant for couple functioning and individual health (for example, Butner, Diamond, & Hicks, 2007). Understanding the role that

such complex affective processes play in the psychobiology of intimate relationships and how these processes may change over the life span is an important direction for future research.

Gender, Health, and Development

As noted earlier, laboratory studies have reliably found that women exhibit greater physiological reactivity to negative interpersonal interactions with their partners than do men, and this finding corresponds to the fact that marital status overall appears to have a more health-protective effect on men than on women over the life span (see the comprehensive review by Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Women, it seems, appear especially sensitive to the cumulative "downsides" of long-term marriages (conflict, hostility, etc.), whereas men appear especially sensitive to the cumulative benefits (support, companionship, etc.). Numerous factors may contribute to this pattern of results. As reviewed by Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues (2001), women are typically socialized to maintain a relational, interdependent sense of self that prioritizes the maintenance of close social ties (Acitelli & Young, 1996). Accordingly, women may be more vigilant in monitoring their relationships for conflicts and problems and may interpret such conflicts and problems as more threatening. Women also tend to be more empathic than men (reviewed in Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983), particularly with respect to decoding nonverbal cues, which may render them particularly sensitive to signs of negative affectivity in their partners. This is consistent with the fact that distressed wives tend to be more accurate in interpreting their husbands' negative messages than vice versa (Notarius, Benson, Sloane, & Vanzetti, 1989) and also that wives' negative emotions are better predicted by their husbands' negative emotions than vice versa (Larson & Almeida, 1999; L. J. Roberts & Krokoff, 1990). In addition to these psychological factors, women may also experience greater day-to-day stress than their husbands because of their disproportionate responsibility for child care and household labor (Hochschild & Machung, 2003), and these stressors often accumulate over the course of many years. Given the ongoing changes in the social roles afforded to men and women, as well as evolving standards and expectations for men's and women's interpersonal behavior within their intimate relationships, a critical question for future research concerns whether gender differences regarding the life-span health implications of intimate relationships will gradually decline.

Another important question for future research concerns the developmental antecedents of such differences. The vast majority of research on physiological reactivity within the context of couple interaction has focused on adult married couples. However, consistent with the developmental premises we have repeatedly emphasized, any observed pattern of emotional and physiological reactivity must be conceptualized as the product of a long chain of interactions that each partner has had with prior partners, family members, and so on, which fundamentally shape his or her particular pattern of stress appraisals and reactivity. Furthermore, as noted earlier, individuals' pattern of reactivity is potentially moderated by both their own and their partner's individual differences regarding hostility, anxiety, attachment style, and other affective and interpersonal dimensions (Carpenter & Kirkpatrick, 1996; Denton, Burleson, Hobbs, Von Stein, & Rodriguez, 2001; Diamond, 2001; Diamond & Hicks, 2004, 2005; Diamond, Hicks, & Otter-Henderson, 2006; Powers, Pietromonaco, Gunlicks, & Sayer, 2006; T. W. Smith & Brown, 1991).

Hence, links between relationship experiences and patterns of physiological reactivity are likely to be progressive and bidirectional, potentially increasing over the course of the life span. Tracing these linkages back to childhood and adolescence, we might imagine that individuals with predispositions for heightened stress reactivity might struggle early on with regulating the negative emotions triggered by day-to-day interpersonal interactions and may therefore develop maladaptive approaches to conflict resolution. This, in turn, might lead to difficulties establishing and sustaining secure and supportive relationships. When these individuals succeed in forming long-term ties, their heightened reactivity and maladaptive interpersonal processes might provoke frequent conflict and exacerbate its negative emotional repercussions, creating increased opportunities for episodes of heightened cardiovascular reactivity. Researchers investigating such potential patterns have emphasized *cascade* models of cumulative adversity and advantage (Repetti et al., 2002; Seeman, 2001; Seeman & Gruenewald, 2006; Singer & Ryff, 1999) in which initial risks for maladaptive patterns of patterns of physiological functioning become magnified over time as a result of behavioral and selection factors which increase individuals' exposure to negative relationships. One key question for future research concerns *when* such pathways become established and the specific individual difference dimensions—including gender as well as personality—that prove most influential in shaping individuals' social-psychological-biological trajectories and their long-term health.

Relationships and Health in Late Life

If the links between relationship experiences and health-related physiological processes are progressive and bidirectional, as just argued, then we should expect to observe particularly strong associations between relationship factors and health status among older couples, who may have spent decades reinforcing such connections through their day-to-day interactions. In fact, evidence suggests this to be the case, and an increasing body of research has found that some of the most distinctive features of late-life intimate relationships (as opposed to those in early or middle adulthood) concern the multiple processes through which mental and physical health become fundamentally interbraided with relationship functioning.

Much research has focused on the simple fact that simply having an intimate relationship in late life appears to be health-protective. A recent comprehensive meta-analysis found that elderly married individuals have, on average, a 12% reduction in the risk of death compared with never-married, divorced, and widowed adults (Manzoli, Villari, Pirone, & Boccia, 2007). Other studies have pinpointed a range of more specific associations between relationship status and mental and physical well-being among the elderly. For example, divorced older adults show greater risk factors for chronic health conditions such as diabetes, and they also have fewer financial resources available to manage their escalating health care costs (Ellis, 2008). Research by Prigerson, Maciejewski, and Rosenheck (2000) pinpointed these costs even more specifically and found interactive effects of marital status and marital quality. They found that older adults who placed the lowest financial "burden" on the health care system (in terms of average usage and cost) were those with intact, well-functioning marriages. The next most "costly" older adults were those with intact but discordant marriages. Individuals who were widowed after having enjoyed a harmonious marriage placed the greatest burden on the health care system, with costs that were more than twice as high as those of individuals in intact, well-functioning marriages (and that were greater than the costs associated with being widowed after a discordant marriage). Notably, other studies have found that the benefits of relationship involvement in late life extend even to basic cognitive functioning. One longitudinal study found that older men who lost a partner or lived alone during a 5-year period had twice as much cognitive decline over a subsequent 10-year period than did men who were married or who lived with someone in those years (van Gelder et al., 2006). Clearly, even when day-to-day interactions between older couples involve periodic conflict and strain, the overall social support and stimulating interpersonal exchange afforded by day-to-day contact with an intimate partner has undoubtedly salubrious effect on older adults' physical and mental well-being.

With respect to basic interpersonal processes, in many respects older couples strongly resemble younger couples, with similar relationship hurdles, such as disagreements over leisure, intimacy, money, housework, in-laws, and basic concerns over fairness and equity (Henry, Miller, & Giarrusso, 2005). They also show similar linkages between positive day-to-day relationship qualities and overall well-being. For example, a daily-diary study found greater levels of life satisfaction among older individuals who reported enjoying their day-to-day spousal interactions, who felt a sense of control and self-assurance in these interactions, and who felt that their partners were responding to their needs (Nezlek, Richardson, Green, & Schatten-Jones, 2002). These findings echo the results of other daily-diary studies showing that feelings of autonomy, social connectedness, and clear demonstrations of partners' positive responsiveness make important contributions to adults' psychological well-being (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Although such studies suggest that many of the core components of positive relationship functioning have the same antecedents and correlates in older couples as among younger couples, older couples nonetheless have a number of distinguishing characteristics that confer unique sources of resiliency *and* stress. On the positive side, their children are typically grown and have long since left home, which reduces the burdens of child rearing that are known to introduce stress and dissatisfaction among couples (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Older adults who have retired from their careers no longer need face the demands of work life, reducing the potent "spill over" of work stress into home life that often impairs marital functioning (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler, & Wethington, 1989; Matjasko & Feldman, 2006). These late-life changes can provide couples with an opportunity to reinvest in their relationship and experience a renewal of intimacy and support. Yet of course, this is not always the case. Some older individuals find themselves lonely and restless without the demands of child rearing and work life, which might introduce new sources of marital strain, and

health problems—one's own and those of one's friends and relatives—introduce new emotional and financial stressors (Henry, Miller, & Giarrusso, 2005).

Studies have found that the patterns of association among older couples' relationship satisfaction and their overall well-being are complex and differentiated by gender. For example, in a study of older couples married approximately 50 years, Cohen and colleagues (Cohen, Geron, & Farchi, 2009) found that for men, marital quality appears to be compartmentalized from other aspects of their lives. Hence, even men facing multiple problems and low global well-being were capable of sustaining positive and satisfying marriages. By the same token, marital strain did not necessarily impair older men's overall well-being. However, the results for women were notably different: Older wives' marital satisfaction was strongly linked to multiple factors outside the marriage, most notably the ongoing quality of their relationships with their children. Importantly, the authors noted that there are potential benefits and drawbacks to both patterns. Older men's compartmentalization might "protect" them from suffering broad-based problems as a result of a troubled marriage, but it might also prevent them from drawing on a well-functioning marriage as a buffer against general psychological and social stressors. The permeability between older women's global well-being and their marital quality means that positive and negative features of each domain will spill over to influence the other.

Other studies have demonstrated complex patterns of bidirectional association among husbands' and wives' mental and physical health in late life. For example, Sandberg and Harper (2000) focused specifically on depression in older adult couples and found that both partners' depressive symptoms were strongly related to their joint marital quality. Furthermore, marital quality was found to mediate associations between each partner's health and daily stressors and the other partner's depression levels. Hence, as an older adult's physical and mental health problems spill over into day-to-day marital functioning, they can quickly become *joint* problems, potentially reducing both partners' ability to provide supportive resources for the other. For example, one recent study of older couples found that if one partner was depressed, the couples' overall affective communication and problem solving showed impairments. These impairments were even greater if both partners were depressed (Harper & Sandberg, 2009). Pruchno and colleagues detected important cross-partner effects on physical and mental health in a longitudinal study of older couples in which one partner had end-stage renal disease (Pruchno, Wilson-Genderson, & Cartwright, 2009). Not only did they find a positive association between partners' respective depressive symptoms, they also found notable cross-partner effects linking the ailing partner's health to the healthy partner's depressive symptoms. Strikingly, they found that for the healthy spouse, depressive symptoms were more strongly associated with longitudinal declines in the ailing partner's physical health than with declines in the healthy spouse's own physical health. Such findings clearly demonstrate that clinical interventions aimed at promoting both physical and mental well-being among older adults will be ineffective unless they take into account transactional marital processes through which stressors, symptoms, and strengths become shared within the dyad, especially for couples facing the types of chronic health problems that become practically inevitable with advanced age. For these reasons, it is encouraging to see that many clinicians have devoted particular attention to developing therapeutic approaches specifically designed for older couples aimed at addressing their unique needs and challenges (Wolinsky, 1990).

EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON A UNIQUE POPULATION: SAME-SEX COUPLES

Up until now we have focused almost exclusively on heterosexual couples, yet one of the most notable developments in psychological research on intimate relationships since the 1990s has been the explosion of inquiry into the relationships of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (collectively denoted *sexual-minority*) individuals. Research indicates that between 40% and 60% of gay men and 50% and 80% of lesbians are partnered (reviewed in Peplau & Spalding, 2000), and their relationships are a significant part of the American interpersonal landscape. The 2000 census found that one in nine cohabitating, unmarried couples in the United States was a same-sex couple (Simons & O'Connell, 2003). A central question addressed by this line of research is the degree to which the relationships of sexual minorities are distinct from those of heterosexuals. Although there is no unified body of psychological theory purporting to explain the specific degree and extent of differences between same-sex and heterosexual couples, much research has been implicitly guided by two explanatory frameworks. The first emphasizes the impact of *social stigmatization and homophobia* on sexual-minority couples, and the second focuses on the influence of *gender-related dynamics* (i.e., combining two males or two females in the same relationship).

Social Stigmatization

Although attitudes toward same-sex sexuality have grown more tolerant in recent years (reviewed in Loftus, 2001), considerable stigma and intolerance remain pervasive. One large survey of American lesbian-gay-bisexual adults found that three fourths had experienced some form of discrimination as a result of their sexual orientation, and almost one-third had suffered violence against themselves or their property (Kaiser Foundation, 2001). Same-sex couples are also frequently disparaged or denied legitimacy by their families of origin and the culture at large (Caron & Ulin, 1997; Gillis, 1998; LaSala, 2000; Oswald, 2002; Patterson, 2000). Even couples who do not face stark and explicit rejection must typically contend with everyday stressors such as poor service and rude treatment when shopping together (Walters & Curran, 1996), difficulty making hotel reservations as a couple (Jones, 1996), and discomfort when attending family functions together (Caron & Ulin, 1997; Oswald, 2002).

These challenges exemplify the many ways in which same-sex couples are exposed to "minority stress"—the unique strain experienced as a direct result of occupying a socially marginalized category. Minority stress has been advanced as an explanation for the finding that although same-sex sexuality is not a mental disorder, sexual minorities do exhibit higher rates of anxiety and mood disorders over the life span, and these problems are amplified among subsets of sexual minorities who report greater prejudice and stigmatization (Meyer, 2003).

Also, whereas family members typically serve as buffers against stress for heterosexuals, among sexual minorities, family members can pose additional sources of minority stress. Gay men and lesbians typically report receiving less support from their biological families than do heterosexuals (Harkless & Fowers, 2005), with approximately one third of gay men and one half of lesbians reporting that a friend or family member refused to accept them because of their sexual orientation (Kaiser Foundation, 2001). In some cases, parents may quietly tolerate the situation (L. Brown, 1989; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Herdt & Beeler, 1998) while still conveying disapproval by refusing to acknowledge or validate the sexual-minority individual's romantic relationships. Such behavior has important consequences, given that the degree of explicit community support a couple perceives for their relationship influences their well-being (Kurdek, 1998b, 2004).

Legal Status

Such findings are obviously notable in light of the ongoing debates over formal recognition for same-sex relationships (for reviews, see Brewer & Wilcox, 2005; Herek, 2006). As of 2009, same-sex marriages were only available in Vermont, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Canada, Spain, Belgium, South Africa, and the Netherlands. In contrast, 40 American states have explicitly *banned* same-sex marriage, either through state laws or constitutional amendments. Yet a number of American states and other countries allow same-sex couples to enter into legally recognized civil unions or domestic partnerships, (including California, New Jersey, England, and New Zealand), and survey data consistently suggest greater public support for "nonmarital" forms of legal recognition than for same-sex marriage. One relatively recent national survey (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006) suggests that the majority of Americans (55%) oppose same-sex marriage, yet research by Brewer (2005), has found that many of these individuals support the notion of same-sex civil unions or domestic partnerships, and in fact the proportion of Americans who would support some form of legal recognition for same-sex relationships consistently exceeds the proportion favoring no recognition whatsoever. Thus, despite consistent opposition to same-sex marriage, most Americans view longstanding, committed same-sex partnerships as deserving of some form of legal recognition.

As noted earlier in the section on commitment, studies have consistently found that legal marriage and other structural "ties" between individuals, such as joint property and the presence of children, function to promote relationship stability by instantiating couples' commitment to one another and providing robust barriers to dissolution (reviewed in Rusbult et al., 2006). Accordingly, the fact that same-sex couples lack formal recognition for their relationships has been posited as a key factor explaining why they have higher breakup rates than married (but not unmarried cohabiting) heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 1992, 1998b, 2000). A 12-year longitudinal study found breakup rates of 19% among gay male couples and 24% among lesbian couples. Notably, after controlling for demographic factors such as length of cohabitation, these rates were not statistically higher than the breakup rate (14%) among unmarried

cohabiting heterosexuals (Kurdek, 2004). We might therefore expect that same-sex couples with the opportunity and inclination to marry or enter civil unions (which provide the same rights as marriage at the state level) would show greater stability than their unmarried counterparts. Recent findings from a 3-year follow-up of same-sex couples who had civil unions in Vermont are consistent with this expectation. Balsam and colleagues (2008) found same-sex couples who had formalized their relationship with a civil union were less likely to have ended their relationships than same-sex couples without civil unions. Of course, longer term longitudinal data are necessary to understand whether the stabilizing influence of civil unions and domestic partnerships operates equivalently over the long-term course of a relationship, and at different stages of each partner's life span.

Another fascinating question concerns the mechanisms through which different forms of formal recognition for same-sex relationships have short- and long-term stabilizing effects. Even couples who have not pursued a civil union might develop numerous other structural ties to one another, such as having a child, naming one another as insurance beneficiaries or legal heirs, purchasing property together, giving one another power of attorney, designating one another as medical proxies, legally taking the same last name, or merging finances (Badgett, 1998; Beals, Impett, & Peplau, 2002; Suter & Oswald, 2003). Comparing breakup rates across couples with different degrees of legal, logistical, bureaucratic, and religious formalization would provide a unique opportunity to examine the relative stabilizing effects of structural versus personal–moral dimensions of relationship commitment over the long-term course of same-sex relationships (M. P. Johnson, 1999).

Gender-Related Dynamics in Couple Functioning

Overall, the similarities between same-sex and heterosexual relationships appear to outweigh the differences. The happiest same-sex couples, like the happiest heterosexual couples, are those who perceive that their relationships provide more benefits than downsides (Beals et al., 2002), and in which partners have similar attitudes (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; Kurdek & Schnopp-Wyatt, 1997), similar social and economic backgrounds (Hall & Greene, 2002), similar expectations and perceptions regarding fairness and equity (Kurdek, 1995, 1998b; Schreurs & Buunk, 1996), and similar views and priorities regarding things such as shared activities, commitment, and sexual exclusivity (Deenen, Gijs, & van Naerssen, 1994).

Other predictors of relationship quality that have been found to function equivalently for same-sex and other-sex couples include partners' personality characteristics; their communication and conflict resolution skills; appraisals of intimacy, autonomy, equality, and mutual trust; and the degree of support the couple perceives for their relationship from their local community (Kurdek, 1998b, 2004). Same-sex and other-sex couples also use the same basic strategies to maintain their relationships, such as sharing tasks, communicating about the relationship, and sharing time together (Dainton & Stafford, 1993; Solomon et al., 2005). They have even been found to fight about the same core issues: finances, affection, sex, criticism, and household tasks (Kurdek, 2004; Solomon et al., 2005). Also, as with heterosexual couples, same-sex couples with higher levels of overall relationship satisfaction report higher levels of sexual satisfaction (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Deenen et al., 1994; Peplau, Cochran, & Mays, 1997).

Yet notably, the most consistent differences that have been observed between same-sex and heterosexual couples concern gender-based dynamics. Contrary to stereotypes positing that same-sex couples implicitly designate one partner to take the classically "female" role and one partner to take the "male" role, studies of interpersonal attitudes, behaviors, and cognitions have generally found that lesbian-gay-bisexual men and women show largely the same gender-related patterns that have been observed among heterosexuals (e.g., Bailey, Gaulin, Agyei, & Gladue, 1994; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, & Barr, 1995). Hence, *combining* two women or two men in the same relationship often magnifies gender-specific patterns, providing a "double dose" of female-typical behavior in female–female relationships and of male-typical behavior in male–male relationships.

For example, gender differences are salient in lesbian and gay men's contrasting approaches to relationship formation. Women's greater relational orientation in comparison to men (reviewed in Cross & Madson, 1997) is reflected in the fact that lesbians have often been found to follow a "friendship script" in developing new romantic relationships, in which emotional compatibility and communication are more important than explicit sexual interest or interaction, whereas gay men's relationship scripts more often involve the establishment of sexual intimacy before the development of emotional intimacy (Rose, Zand, & Cimi, 1993).

Although noticeable from the earliest stages of relationship formation, such differences are also readily observed in established relationships. Kurdek (1998b) found that female–female couples tend to report greater intimacy (manifested in shared time together and the degree to which partners maintained a "couple" identity) than male–male or male–female couples. Similarly, Zacks, Green, and Marrow (1988) found that compared with heterosexual couples, female–female couples reported higher levels of cohesion, adaptability, and satisfaction in their relationships, a result that the authors attributed to women's gender role socialization. Some clinicians have expressed concern that female–female couples' heightened intimacy can sometimes border on detrimental tendencies toward "fusion" or "merger" (Biaggio, Coan, & Adams, 2002), whereas tendencies toward interpersonal distance have been raised as a unique challenge facing gay male couples (Tunnell & Greenan, 2004).

Gender-magnification effects are also evident with regard to sexual exclusivity. Numerous studies have found that male–male couples are more likely than either male–female or female–female couples to report engaging in extradyadic sexual activity, often with the explicit knowledge of their partner (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Peplau et al., 1997; Solomon, Rothblum, & Balsam, 2004). This is commonly attributed to the fact that men's socialization allows them to separate sex from love more easily than do women, making it possible for two men in a committed, enduring bond to understand mutually and agree that extradyadic sexual activity does not threaten their primary tie to one another. In such arrangements, extradyadic sex may have few negative repercussions for relationship satisfaction or stability and might actually foster some benefits (Deenen et al., 1994; Hickson et al., 1992).

Gender dynamics also play a role in issues of power and equality, manifested in decision making and division of household labor. Overall, same-sex couples show more equitable distributions of household labor than do heterosexual couples (Kurdek, 1993a; Patterson, 1995; Solomon et al., 2004), although male–male and female–female couples appear to operationalize equity in different ways, with male couples dividing up responsibility for specific tasks and female couples sharing the performance of each task (Kurdek, 1993a). It is not uncommon for same-sex partners to mix and match "female-typed" and "male-typed" tasks and roles according to their respective skills and interests (M. Huston & Schwartz, 2002). Also, same-sex couples appear to place a higher value on equity between partners and are less likely to take for granted a lopsided distribution of labor, decision making, and influence. For such reasons, same-sex couples provide a fascinating model for contemporary couples seeking creative relationship and household practices that serve the unique needs of their families more effectively than rigid, traditional, gender-based relationship roles (Steil, 2000).

Overall, then, the factors that make same-sex romantic relationships different from other-sex romantic relationships appear to have far more to do with gender than with sexual orientation. Sexual-minority and heterosexual individuals do not go about the processes of forming and maintaining romantic ties all that differently from one another, but men and women do, and such differences are echoed and magnified in same-sex couples.

PROMISING NEW DIRECTIONS IN RELATIONSHIP RESEARCH

Relationship Development

In the 1960s and 1970s, during the heyday of early research on romantic relationships, the focus was almost entirely on initial romantic attraction (primarily coming from an evolutionary perspective). As the field of relationship research developed and expanded, researchers gradually shifted their attention away from initial relationship processes and toward the examination of intact relationship dynamics (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008a). As a result, our field now boasts a comprehensive understanding of existing relationships but understands little about how these relationships got started. Although some studies have used retrospective reports to assess partners' perceptions of why they first became attracted to one another and how the early stages of pairbonding progressed, such data are of limited use given the unavoidable retrospective bias that comes into play. Individuals who have already committed to a romantic partner are likely to perceive the early days of their relationship in an overly positive light, as if it had always been "meant to be." Even more important, retrospective approaches fail to capture unsuccessful relationships. If a couple does not make it to the 4- to 6-month point, they are unlikely to end up in a research study on romantic relationships, thereby hampering our attempts to understand whether there are certain interpersonal dynamics, or certain combinations of personalities, that presage early relationship failure. The only solution to this quandary, of course, is longitudinal research. One approach would be to follow the same individual as he or she starts and progresses through a variety of relationships; another approach would be to sample brand-new couples and follow them through the entire course of their relationship. Both

approaches, of course, are logistically demanding and, in some cases, unfeasible. In particular, individuals who have just formed brand-new relationships may be too self-conscious—and too concerned about "scaring off" their new partner—to participate in a study that will ask them and their partner detailed, intimate questions about their fledgling romance.

Yet in recent years, a creative new solution to the problem of studying relationship formation has emerged. Eli Finkel and his colleagues (Finkel, Eastwick, & Matthews, 2007) have pioneered the investigation of "speed dating" as a naturalistic context in which to study early relationship processes. Speed-dating events were initally organized as an alternative to conventional dating (in which "trying out" each potential partner took an entire evening) and online dating (in which there were many potential partners to choose from but no opportunity to interact with them face-to-face). At speed-dating events, multiple singles gather together in the same place, and over the course of the evening, every individual has the chance to interact one-on-one with every other individual there for a short amount of time. Afterward, participants have the opportunity to indicate which individuals they liked the most, and the organizers put individuals in contact with one another if they show reciprocal liking.

To adapt speed dating for research purposes, Finkel and his team simply asked participants to fill out a variety of self-report measures before the speed-dating session, including assessments of personality, attachment style, expectations, and so on. They then tracked the "matches" established after the event, following their development into full-blown relationships or their early demise. Given the amount of initial data available on each partner, they were able to analyze factors that predicted partners' liking for one another as well as the success of the relationship. The findings have the potential to reveal early relationship dynamics that, up until now, have never been prospectively assessed. For example, a recent speed-dating study conducted by Eastwick and Finkel (2008b) has called into question the well replicated finding that men prefer physical attractiveness in a mate more than women do and that women prefer good earning prospects in a mate more than men do. Eastwick and Finkel's study showed a discrepancy between stated preferences (before the speed-dating session) and individuals' eventual "flesh-and-blood" choices. In another speed-dating study, Eastwick and Finkel (2008a) demonstrated strong effects of attachment anxiety on initial relationship formation, thereby proving that a full-blown attachment bond need not be in place for an individual's attachment anxiety to begin shaping the course and dynamics of the relationship.

Innovative research paradigms such as speed dating greatly increase researchers' capacity to investigate the entire developmental course of an intimate relationship, which continues to be among the largest and most important gaps in our attempt to understand intimate relationships from a life-span/developmental perspective. Such new methodological approaches have the potential to challenge many long-standing notions about romantic relationship development and to generate and answer important new questions about the factors that initially draw individuals to one another, keep them together, or push them apart.

Modeling Dynamic Change: New Approaches

By now, it may be clear that our "cascade" model of the cumulative, bidirectional influences between intimate relationships and developmental processes over the life span raises intractable "chicken-and-egg" problems when trying to determine why certain individuals end up in certain types of relationships with certain types of outcomes. As reviewed in this chapter, individuals bring a range of individual characteristics into their relationships, including their gender, ethnicity, personality, attachment style, family history, religious background, and so on, as well as their developmental status with regard to a range of different social and psychological skills and capacities. All of these characteristics interact dynamically with the characteristics of the other partner to shape the behavioral, cognitive, and affective features of the relationship (good vs. poor communication, warm accommodation vs. hostile criticism, frequent support vs. neglect). Over time, as we have emphasized, partners' experiences in their relationships feed forward to shape the continued development of their skills and capacities, either reinforcing or redirecting the long-range developmental trajectories of multiple psychosocial characteristics. An initially optimistic and secure person saddled with a unremittingly critical and negative partner might, over time, become more pessimistic and avoidant. Alternatively, an anxious and rejection-sensitive individual who spends 20 years with a warm, reliable, and responsive partner might eventually become secure and confident.

The existence of such complex, bidirectional influences between individuals and their relationship experiences has long been acknowledged, yet in recent years, there has been growing interest in capturing and modeling the ongoing, dynamic processes through which these mutual influences shape the course of relationship development over different time scales and at different stages of each partner's life span. Although long-term follow-up studies of established relationships are capable of detecting change after it has occurred, they are usually unable to identify how the change took place, whether there were certain turning points that proved significant (and why), and the specific combinations of traits and processes which drove the process of change. Follow-up studies are also unable to capture dynamic *discontinuities* during the course of a relationship, when longstanding stable processes suddenly produce unexpected transformations through which relationships shift into qualitatively different states (Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002). Understanding and capturing such processes is critical for understanding how and why couples progress—sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly—from states of satisfaction to distress, from betrayal to forgiveness, and from despair to renewal.

Such "transformative processes" and their underlying parameters have garnered increasing research attention in recent years (Amato, 2007; Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007; Hill, 2007). Researchers such as Fincham (2007) have argued that conventional, linear approaches to modeling relationship development, many of which overemphasize the predictive influence of specific negative traits or behaviors, are ill equipped to model such transformations appropriately. He noted that a sizable proportion of couples—contrary to all reasonable expectations—have been observed to recover spontaneously from pernicious marital discord over time, without undergoing any sort of intervention. To understand such cases, Fincham called for greater attention to *self-regulatory repair mechanisms* in couples—attributable to potent interactions between each partner's traits and characteristics and their own developing chains of adaptive interaction—which may prove critical for understanding why some relationships succeed over time, against all odds, whereas others inexplicably erode.

Close attention to the potent bidirectional interactions between individuals and relationship processes is critical for understanding these phenomena. Accordingly, a number of researchers have begun to explore *dynamical systems theory* as a conceptual and analytical framework for modeling transformation and adaptation in relationships over time (Gottman, Murray, Swanson, Tyson, & Swanson, 2002; Gottman, Swanson, & Swanson, 2002). Dynamical systems models seek to explain how complex patterns *emerge, stabilize, change, and restabilize* over time. Although originally developed by mathematicians and physicists to model complex physical phenomena in the natural world, they have increasingly been applied to social-behavioral phenomena ranging from motor development to cognition to language (for early, seminal examples, see Fogel & Thelen, 1987; Thelen, Kelso, & Fogel, 1987) in order to better represent how dynamic interchanges between endogenous factors (such as genes, hormones, skills, capacities, thoughts, and feelings) and exogenous factors (such as relationships, experiences, cultural norms, family history, etc.) give rise to novel forms of thought and behavior that are substantively more than the "sum of their parts." As noted earlier in our review of attachment style, some of the most provocative and generative new approaches to understanding continuity and change in attachment style over the life span are based in dynamical systems theory (Fraley & Brumbaugh, 2004).

According to dynamical systems theory, novel forms of thought and behavior arise as a function of *self-organization*, defined as the spontaneous development of order within a complex system (Kelso, 1997). A closely related concept is *emergence*, defined as the coming-into-being of altogether original behaviors or experiences through dynamic, unpredictable interactions between different elements in the system. As reviewed by Fogel (2006), researchers and theorists have increasingly come to view emergence and transformation as fundamental processes of psychological change, encompassing not only qualitative shifts in subjective experience but also processes of cognitive discovery and creativity (e.g., Gottlieb, 1992; Tronick et al., 1998).

The value of this approach for studies of relationship development and transformation over the life span is obvious. The more we have learned about the multidetermined, multidimensional nature of relationship functioning, the more evident it becomes that there are no single, determinative predictors. The questions we must ask are not "which marriages will fail?" but "which dynamic processes are most likely to provide couples—and individuals—with the resiliency they need to adapt to an unknowable future? How do such processes become established among couples with vastly different prior trajectories of interpersonal functioning?" Capturing such processes is, of course, logistically difficult. Dynamical systems approaches require longitudinal observation over both short and long stretches of time, aimed at capturing change as it takes place, rather than simply comparing specific outcomes before and after a presumed shift (Fogel, 2006). Many relationship researchers have already gravitated toward the use of daily diaries to capture everyday relationship processes (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003; Brandstatter, 2007; Laurenceau &

Bolger, 2005), and such methods offer great promise for applications of dynamical systems perspectives. The difficulty, however, comes with selecting the right period of observation (The very beginning of the relationship? Somewhere in the middle?) and the right time scale (Daily experiences? Weekly? Multiple interactions within the course of a single day?). Many of these decisions are driven more by logistical than theoretical concerns, but the inconvenient truth is that life-span/developmental models of intimate relationships necessitate much broader time scales. The next generation of developmentally oriented research on intimate relationships will likely bring an increasingly diverse range of methodological approaches to bear on the study of intimate relationships at multiple stages of development. By revealing the fundamental dynamics of such relationships "in action," unfolding over real time, such research will undoubtedly make critical contributions to our understanding of the nature and developmental significance of intimate relationships over the life span.

CONCLUSION

Presently, relationship research might well represent one of the fastest developing and influential branches of psychological theory and research, with enormous potential to directly affect human health and happiness. As psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, and physicians increasingly document the wide-ranging effects of intimate relationships on psychological and physical well-being, it becomes increasingly important to understand the basic processes through which individuals form, maintain, change, and dissolve these relationships and the diverse and interacting mechanisms through which they shape our thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and physiological functioning over the life course. The field of relationship science has already yielded an enormous body of knowledge regarding these topics, and it is likely that we will continue to observe dramatic developments and transformations in our understanding of intimate relationships in the years to come.

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