PART I

MAJOR THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Promoting intimacy: strategies suggested by the appetitive side

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The road to intimacy is well-traveled by both basic researchers and interventionists. At the intersection of their journeys lies the possibility that theoretically grounded research can suggest useful strategies for helping couples increase the level of intimacy in their relationships. The value of better integrating these two approaches has often been noted. For example, researchers commonly observe that therapeutic applications can provide tests of the real-world relevance of theories developed in the lab (e.g., Olson, Russell, & Sprenkle, 1980; Reis, 2002). Also, basic relationship research can identify promising new possibilities for intervening with distressed couples (Bradbury, 2002). Practitioners, on the other hand, contribute to relationship research by indicating some of the more common problems and patterns that appear in their case work, and by establishing "what works" in an ecologically valid setting (Cowan & Cowan, 2002).

In the case of intimacy, interventions, both informal and formal, are plentiful. For example, premarital skills-training programs typically focus on communication skills that help partners maintain or enhance intimacy, given the high potential for conflict that marriage entails (e.g., Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 1994; Rogge & Rolffs, Chapter 15, this volume). More generally, most couples' therapies focus on preventing or overcoming destructive patterns of communication and interaction, both of which are closely linked to intimacy (see Lavner & Bradbury, Chapter 13, this volume, for a review). In this chapter, we propose that this emphasis addresses only one side of the relevant relationship processes, namely the aversive side. A significant body of research, described later in the chapter, indicates that appetitive processes – approach-oriented processes activated by positively valenced cues or states – also play an influential role in the life of relationships. These processes, we believe, have received insufficient attention in the

development and application of interventions to increase intimacy. This omission seems unfortunate, because intimacy itself reflects a largely appetitive process – that is, intimacy is a desired goal that people hope to attain and are motivated to pursue. Indeed, intimacy is one of the most prized outcomes that people seek from their close relationships (Reis, 1990; Reis & Gable, 2003). That being the case, interventions that target appetitive motives and processes may be better suited toward enhancing intimacy than interventions that focus on aversive motives and processes.

The distinction between appetitive and aversive processes in relationships provides a theme that cuts across most of the chapters in this volume. Traditional approaches to research and intervention have often seemed to assume that a good relationship is simply the absence of a bad relationship. Although historically sensible – a major impetus for relationship research has been (and continues to be) the desire to alleviate this all too often toxic source of human distress – the conflation of good relating with the absence of bad relating reveals a significant gap in knowledge and treatment: Once conflict has been alleviated, how can gratifying, meaningful, and enjoyable patterns of interacting be established? "Bad may be stronger than good," as Baumeister et al. (2001) concluded in their wide-ranging review of evidence from many areas of research, including relationships, but that does not imply that the elimination of bad is sufficient to create good. The premise of this volume is that successful relating requires a separate understanding of the distinctive appetitive processes that promote successful relationships. This chapter therefore provides a general framework for the rest of this volume.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the distinction between appetitive and aversive processes, explaining why we believe that intimacy is better characterized in terms of the former than the latter. This account will set the stage for discussions of several areas of relationship research that describe processes that are largely appetitive in nature and that suggest promising possibilities for intimacy-promoting interventions. In each section, we link lines of research within the appetitive tradition to existing or potentially fruitful interventions for promoting intimacy.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE APPETITIVE–AVERSIVE DISTINCTION FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Imagine running into an old friend who asks how your romantic relationship is going. Most people would begin their reply with a single adjective, located somewhere along a roughly univariate continuum ranging from awful to amazing. Phenomenologically, the characterization of affective ratings along a single dimension is effortless, familiar, and natural, which is probably one reason why it appears often in research. For example, the classic Osgood semantic differential model posits that people appraise most entities along

three dimensions, the primary one of which is evaluation, ranging from bad to good (the other two dimensions are potency and activity; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). This primacy may reflect the impact of evolutionary forces, which have shaped the human brain to rapidly and efficiently evaluate whether a newly encountered stimulus is hostile or hospitable (Cacioppo & Gardner, 1999; Hunt & Campbell, 1997).

Although the single-dimension approach may be a useful heuristic for quickly summarizing one's assessment of an entity, considerable evidence now indicates that the underlying processes are better represented by a bivariate approach. That is, across diverse conceptual domains, researchers have found support for a two-dimensional model – one dimension denoting the presence or absence of unfavorable attributes, and the other representing the presence or absence of favorable attributes (which Gable & Reis, 2001, referred to as the *aversive* and *appetitive systems*, respectively). For example:

- Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson (1997) proposed with supportive evidence that the positive and negative aspects of an attitude object are assessed via independent mechanisms, the results of which are then combined to yield an overall attitude.
- In affect research, the causes and mechanisms underlying positive affects (e.g., elation, enthusiasm) have been distinguished from the causes and mechanisms underlying negative affects (e.g., sadness, fear, anger; Carver, Sutton, & Scheier, 2000; Watson & Tellegen, 1985).
- Several theoretical models of motivation and self-regulation distinguish processes designed to reduce the discrepancy between the self and desired outcomes from those that are intended to increase the discrepancy between the self and non-desired outcomes. Carver (1996) and Elliot (2006) referred to these as approach and avoidance motives, respectively, whereas Higgins (2011) described these motives as promotion and prevention orientations. In Gray's (1987) theoretical model, these tendencies are the products of functionally independent neurobiological mechanisms – the behavioral activation and behavioral inhibition systems.
- Most models of personality structure differentiate sensitivities to real or potential rewards (positives) and punishments or threats (negatives). In the well-known Big 5 model, extraversion and neuroticism are conceptualized in this way.
- Coping skills can be categorized according to whether they involve movement toward or away from stressful or disturbing events (Moos & Holahan, 2003).

Although these diverse constructs describe distinct behavioral domains, their conceptual parallels suggest the existence of an underlying common core, a notion that some of the aforementioned theorists have advanced. These theorists were treading a well-worn path: William James (1890), for example,

commented that "present pleasures are tremendous reinforcers, and present pains tremendous inhibitors of whatever action leads to them," thus positing pleasure and pain as basic but distinct "springs of action" (both quotes, pp. 549–550). Similar ideas were offered by Freud and Pavlov, among others. Gable, Reis, and Elliot (2003) took a more empirical tack to this question, factor-analyzing measures from the domains noted earlier, to determine whether a pair of latent variables, representing separate appetitive and aversive factors, would emerge. They did – in several data sets spanning varied constructs, measures, and samples, a two-factor solution corresponding to the appetitive–aversive distinction provided a better fit to the data than several conceptually plausible alternative models.

In the domain of intimacy and relationships, however, the appetitive-aversive distinction has not gained much traction, although the idea has not been entirely ignored either. For example, consistent with the domain-specificity idea advanced earlier, Fiori and Consedine (2013) found that among first-year college students, more frequent positive social exchanges predicted better emotional well-being on positive dimensions (e.g., life satisfaction), whereas more negative social exchanges predicted poorer emotional well-being on negative dimensions (e.g., depressed mood). Newsom, Rook, Nishishiba, Sorkin, and Mahan (2005) found a similar pattern of results in a large national sample of older adults (see also Finch, Okun, Barrera, Zautra, & Reich, 1989). In a somewhat different vein, Fincham and Linfield (1997) developed a measure designed to separately assess positive and negative feelings toward a spouse, finding that each of these predicted a unique pattern of behaviors and attributions. This work has been extended by several researchers, who demonstrated that two-factor solutions (positive and negative) better modeled their data than a single-factor solution (bad-good), and that these factors uniquely predicted distinct outcomes (e.g., Mattson, Paldino, & Johnson, 2007; Mattson, Rogge, Johnson, Davidson, & Fincham, 2013). For example, in one study of romantic couples, positive appraisals, but not negative appraisals, predicted sexual satisfaction, whereas negative appraisals, but not positive appraisals, predicted hostile conflict (Mattson et al., 2013). In another study, women's relationship maintenance behaviors were related to both positive and negative appraisals, but men's relationship maintenance behaviors were related only to positive appraisals (Malinen, Tolvanen, & Rönkä, 2012).

The idea that positive and negative features of close relationships represent separable dimensions underlies recent interest in ambivalent relationships. That is, beyond being bad or good, relationships may also be ambivalent – that is, high in both good and bad qualities – or indifferent – that is, low in both good and bad qualities. In a series of studies, Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, and their colleagues have shown that ambivalent relationships have undesirable effects on health and well-being, compared to both positive

(supportive) or negative (hostile) relationships (e.g., Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, & Flinders, 2001; Uchino et al., 2012; see Holt-Lunstad & Uchino, 2015, for a review). Ambivalence, as these researchers conceptualize it, may be similar to Gottman's (1993) description of volatile couples, for whom frequent conflict is tempered by recurrent expressions of affection (although in Gottman's work their balance of positive to negative is thought to be largely salutary).

It may seem surprising to some readers that the differentiation of positives and negatives is not more fully established in relationship research. After all, as mentioned earlier and as Fincham, May, and Beach (this volume) explain, it is a logical fallacy to assume that the absence of a negative indicates the presence of a positive. A person's leg may not be broken, but that does not mean that he or she is capable of running a mile at a fast pace. At present, there are few interventions for couples that directly target the advancement of positive relationship features. The good news, however, is that basic research in relationship science has generated theory and evidence concerning several relationship processes that are primarily appetitive in their operation. We next discuss six such examples, including possible implications for application.

RESPONSIVENESS

Partner responsiveness is key to the development of intimacy. Relationships deepen when people feel that their partners have been responsive to their "opening up" – that is, when they have revealed important, central aspects of the self, their partners have shown understanding, validation, and caring (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Thus, whereas earlier models of intimacy development emphasized self-disclosure, it is now recognized that self-disclosure is relevant only insofar as it establishes the possibility for partners to display (or not to display) responsiveness.

Both self-disclosure and responsiveness may take myriad forms, spanning verbal, nonverbal, and behavior expressions. For example, one might reveal an important personal loss by speaking to a friend, by crying silently, or by staying home all day in one's pajamas; similarly, a partner might be responsive by saying, "I'm so sorry," by hugging the person, or by coming over and keeping the stay-at-home person company. Self-disclosure of self-relevant material, such as values, personal feelings, and private facts (Pronin, Fleming, & Steffel, 2008), is a necessary stage-setting part of this process but it also makes the discloser vulnerable to the responder. Interdependence theorists refer to this as a diagnostic situation, because the discloser can infer the extent to which the responder prioritizes being supportive of her needs and concerns from the listener's choice to be responsive or not (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Simpson, 2007).

Numerous studies have shown that supportive partner responses to self-disclosure promote the development and maintenance of intimacy and closeness (e.g., Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Laurenceau & Barrett, 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Reis, 2006). On the part of the discloser, responsiveness signals the partner's understanding and concern, which normatively enhances the willingness to engage in further self-disclosure, to trust the partner's goodwill, and to commit to the relationship. Responsiveness also benefits the listener, in the manner of mutual cyclical growth, a concept that will be discussed in the next section. The discloser's commitment engenders a greater willingness to be responsive when the original listener self-discloses, effectively reversing roles and promoting intimacy from both partners' perspectives. Further adding to this cyclical buildup of closeness and connection, serving in the role of listener helps fulfill belongingness needs when the discloser accepts support (Hackenbracht & Gasper, 2013).

Given that self-disclosure and responsiveness foster relationship flourishing, it might be asked, to what extent is this an appetitive process? Traditional conceptualizations of this process emphasize relatively aversive contexts. For example, responsiveness is most often studied in two substantive contexts, conflict resolution and social support. Conflict resolution refers to the manner in which partners resolve differences of preference or opinion, or find ways to overcome actions and events that threaten their relationship. Social support refers to helping a partner cope with stressful or adverse life events. Both cases, in other words, concern the avoidance or amelioration of undesirable circumstances, which should be understood conceptually in terms of aversive processes.

Responsiveness has an appetitive side, which, although less well understood, also contributes to relationship intimacy. One such example concerns the role of a partner's responsive support in promoting progress toward personal goals and aspirations. Research on the Michelangelo Phenomenon indicates that a partner's responsive support of personal goals – termed behavioral affirmation in that work – facilitates movement toward those goals as well as relationship well-being (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). This kind of support can also promote relationship development, as shown by Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010), who found that people tend to feel closer to others who are instrumental in helping them attain desired goals (in that work, feeling closer is considered a motivated cognition that facilitates goal pursuit). A close other's success in pursuing personal goals may also produce vicarious satisfaction for partners (Beach et al., 1998; McCulloch, Fitzsimons, Chua, & Albarracin, 2011).

Another example of the appetitive side of responsiveness comes from attachment theory. Bowlby (1969) proposed that when the attachment system is dormant, other behavioral systems, such as affiliation, exploration, and

sexuality, may become behaviorally salient. In other words, in terms of the appetitive-aversive distinction, when the aversive system is quiet, the influence of the appetitive system is more evident. Responsive support, experienced either in a partner's current availability or in mental representations of secure relationships, allows people to engage in these positive relationships processes. For example, secure individuals tend to socialize more enjoyably and more intimately, even with others who are not attachment figures (Bartholomew, 1990; Schwartz, Lindley, & Buboltz, 2007; Tidwell, Reis, & Shaver, 1996), and are more likely to enjoy sexuality as part of a healthy intimate relationship (J. Feeney & Noller, 2004; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Responsive support and attachment security have also been linked to exploration in the achievement domain and in intrinsically interesting laboratory tasks (e.g., Elliot & Reis, 2003; B. Feeney & Thrush, 2010), although existing studies have not directly examined exploration in more relational terms. Presumably, exploration in relationships would involve openness and receptivity to novel relational experiences, a predominance of approach as opposed to avoidance motives, and an emphasis on thriving as opposed to maintaining safety (B. Feeney & Collins, 2015). Future research is needed here.

Many interventions target communication skills that are designed to enhance responsiveness (see Lavner & Bradbury, Chapter 13, this volume, for a review), although most of these seem oriented toward precluding, minimizing, or ameliorating conflict. An important possibility for the future will be to integrate a more appetitive approach to responsiveness in conjunction with these existing methods, perhaps by emphasizing the manner in which virtuous cycles can be initiated and maintained.

INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY AND MUTUAL CYCLICAL GROWTH

Interdependence theory describes the processes by which interacting partners influence each other's outcomes. Intimate relationships are always interdependent, of course, so the theory provides a useful model for explaining how each partner's actions influence the other's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. In its most popular application, interdependence theory is used to describe partners' reactions to conflicts of interest – situations in which one partner's personal needs, preferences, or goals directly contradict those of the other (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). Such situations are thought to be diagnostic of the state of a relationship, because they demonstrate how partners take each other's wishes and needs into account in deciding how to resolve these conflicts (Murray et al., 2006). Less well-known are the ways in which interdependence theory applies to more appetitive circumstances.

Rusbult and colleagues' (e.g., Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001) model of mutual cyclical growth illustrates how increasing interdependence

can promote the development of intimacy. Although intimacy is not explicitly discussed in most papers on interdependence theory, research indicates that relatively high levels of interdependence are necessary to develop and maintain intimacy (Baker & McNulty, 2013). Mutual cyclical growth is a dyadic process in which each partner's perception of the other's pro-relational behavior (behavior enacted to benefit the relationship) fosters his or her own pro-relational behavior, thereby increasing the overall level of relationship-enhancing behaviors present, in the manner of a virtuous cycle. For example, imagine that Ashley feels gratitude about Chris's kindness to her. These feelings should strengthen her trust in Chris and her commitment to their relationship, both factors that would increase her tendency to behave in a kindly manner toward Chris. Chris, perceiving Ashley's goodwill, should experience comparable gains in trust and commitment, which would increase his kindly inclination toward Ashley, and so on.

Virtuous cycles are less well-established in relationship science than vicious cycles, their less benevolent counterpart: for example, the pattern of escalating negativity known as negative affect reciprocity, in which partners respond to each other's disagreeable behavior with additional negativity. This pattern is one of the best predictors of divorce and breakup (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Alternatively, virtuous cycles, in which positive behaviors are reciprocated, are less well-known, but they may nonetheless be influential in cultivating relationship well-being. Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, and Agnew (1999) demonstrated one such cycle in the context of commitment: Commitment inspires relationship-enhancing behaviors such as accommodation and sacrifice, which are interpreted by partners as signs of goodwill, thus inspiring trust and commitment, and the partner's own willingness to enact relationship-enhancing behaviors. It follows that this sequence would also enhance intimacy, in that the vulnerability inherent in intimacy requires trusting in a partner's well-meaning intentions toward oneself.

Recent research on gratitude provides another example of this process in an appetitive context. Expressing gratitude conveys trust to a partner, inasmuch as it acknowledges awareness of his or her benevolence (Emmons, 2004). Feeling and expressing gratitude toward one's romantic partner has been linked to higher communal strength and satisfaction in romantic relationships (e.g., Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013; Lambert, Clarke, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010). Additionally, when people feel appreciated by their partners they report showing more appreciation and being more responsive in return (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). These effects persist, such that expressed gratitude is associated with increased next-day relationship satisfaction and feelings of connectedness in both partners (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). It is easy to make sense of these findings in terms of mutual cyclical growth: expressions of gratitude prompt feelings of appreciation and commitment, which enhance one's