Optimizing Assurance: The Risk Regulation System in Relationships

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A model of risk regulation is proposed to explain how people balance the goal of seeking closeness to a romantic partner against the opposing goal of minimizing the likelihood and pain of rejection. The central premise is that confidence in a partner's positive regard and caring allows people to risk seeking dependence and connectedness. The risk regulation system consists of 3 interconnected "if–then" contingency rules, 1 cognitive, 1 affective, and 1 behavioral. The authors describe how general perceptions of a partner's regard structure the sensitivity of these 3 "if–then" rules in risky relationship situations. The authors then describe the consequences of such situated "if–then" rules for relationship well-being and conclude by integrating other theoretical perspectives and outlining future research directions.

Keywords: relationships, rejection, perceived regard, risk, belongingness

Ask somebody to love you
Takes a lot of nerve
Ask somebody to love you
You got a lot of nerve—Paul Simon, "Look at That, You're the One"

How do people find the courage they need to love when risking greater closeness to another leaves them more vulnerable to the hurt and pain of rejection? The psychological costs of rejection only increase as interdependence and closeness grow (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Imagine how crushing it can be to have a request for a first date rejected or to have a dating relationship end after a few months. Such rebuffs pale in comparison with believing that one's spouse is uninterested in providing support or is attracted to the physical attributes of another. In fact, the ultimate rejection, the dissolution of a marriage, is a substantial risk factor for self-doubt and depression (Gotlib & Hammen, 1992).

Given the potential pain of romantic rejection, people should be motivated to think and behave in ways that minimize dependence on a partner and, consequently, minimize the likelihood of being hurt (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). However, people need to

risk substantial dependence (Kelley, 1979) to establish the kind of satisfying relationship that can fulfill basic needs for belonging or connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). They need to behave in ways that give a partner power over their outcomes and emotions and to think in ways that invest great value and importance in the relationship (Gagne & Lydon, 2004; Murray, 1999).

For instance, people in satisfying relationships respond to their partner's needs as they arise and leave the timing of repayment up to the partner (Clark & Grote, 1998). They disclose self-doubts to their partner, seeking social support for personal weaknesses that could elicit rejection (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992). People in satisfying relationships also excuse transgressions when a partner has behaved badly (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Rather than being sensitized to partner traits that might prime rejection concerns, people in satisfying relationships turn negatives into positives. They see virtues in their partner that they do not see in others (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000) and that are also not apparent to their friends (Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000) or their partner (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a; Neff & Karney, 2002). Taking such risks optimizes the benefits and minimizes the costs afforded by adult relationships (Kelley et al., 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003).

These *relationship-promotive* transformations are critical for fostering satisfying relationships. However, they also compromise self-protection concerns by (a) increasing the likelihood of rejection in the short term and (b) intensifying how much the ultimate loss of the relationship would hurt (Simpson, 1987). If Sally relies on Harry for support, she will expose herself to some less than supportive behavior on his part. If Sally sees Harry's faults as evidence of his special fit to her, she is also unlikely to believe that others could make her as happy or that she could easily recover from losing him (D. T. Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998). Consequently, the intense social pain of losing a

valued other should increase people's motivation to think and behave in ways that both limit vulnerability to the partner's actions in the short term and diminish the long-term potential pain of relationship loss.

The essential dilemma of interdependence is this: The thoughts and behaviors that are critical for establishing satisfying close connections with others necessarily increase both the short-term risk of rejection and the long-term pain of rejection. This article presents a conceptual model developed to explain how people negotiate the conflict between the goal of creating satisfying interpersonal connections and the goal of protecting themselves against rejection.

The organizing assumption is that perceptions of a partner's regard and caring control a cognitive, affective, and behavioral system for resolving this goal conflict (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). The proposed model of the risk regulation system stipulates three interconnected "if–then" contingency rules that operate to track the risks of rejection and resolve conflicts between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals. These rules involve the following: (a) an "*appraisal*" rule system that links situations of dependence to the goal of gauging a partner's acceptance, (b) a "*signaling*" rule system that links perceptions of a partner's acceptance or rejection to the experience of gratified or hurt feelings and coincident gains or losses in self-esteem, and (c) a "*dependence regulation*" rule system that links perceptions of a partner's acceptance or rejection to the willingness to risk future dependence. Our objective is to specify the imprint that dependence dilemmas leave on relationships. We do this by detailing how confidence in a partner's regard prioritizes the pursuit of secure connectedness goals and how doubts about a partner's regard prioritize the need for self-protection.

Dependence Dilemmas in Interpersonal Relationships

Situations of dependence are fundamental to romantic life. One partner's actions constrain the other's capacity to satisfy important needs and goals. Such dependence is evident from the lowest to the highest level of generality. At the level of specific situations, couples are interdependent in multiple and varied ways, ranging from deciding whose movie preference to favor on a given weekend to deciding what constitutes a fair and appropriate allocation of household chores. At a broader level, couples must negotiate different personalities, such as merging one partner's laissez-faire nature with the other's more controlled style. Couples are also interdependent in their choice of relationship goals, such as deciding when and whether to have a child or finding a way to balance one partner's need for closeness with the other's need for autonomy (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Holmes, 2002). At the highest level, the existence of the relationship itself requires both partners' continued cooperation.

Inevitably, significant conflicts of interest and the necessity of compromise and sacrifice will arise in these negotiations (Kelley, 1979). This dilemma is made all the more important because people do not routinely choose the partner who would provide the best (or even a decent) fit to their personality and goals (Lykken & Tellegen, 1993). Take the simple example of a couple trying to decide whether to go to the current blockbuster action film or a contemplative arts film. Imagine that Sally confides to Harry that she believes that seeing the action film will help distract her from

work worries, concerns that she fears the arts film Harry wants to see will only compound. In making this request, Sally is putting her psychological welfare in Harry's hands. Consequently, like most situations in which some sacrifice on Harry's part is required, Sally risks discovering that Harry is not willing to be responsive to her needs.

The exact nature of such situations may change throughout a relationship's developmental course. However, it is precisely such situations as these—situations of dependence in which one's partner's responsiveness to one's needs is in question—that activate the threat of rejection in romantic life. The risk of rejection in such situations depends on the amount of control a partner has over one's outcomes and the degree to which the partner's preferences overlap with one's own (Kelley et al., 2003). The riskiest situations for Sally are ones in which Harry has control over her outcomes but his preferences in the situation diverge from her own. Making herself vulnerable to Harry's preferences in such situations can have real costs. In the example we have given, Sally might have to endure the art film. However, the greater potential cost is a symbolic one—namely, the perception that Harry might not care about her goals or needs and, by extension, that he might not care about her. Situations such as these highlight the risk of a much more threatening form of rejection—the loss of the relationship itself.

Given multiple layers of interdependence, people routinely find themselves in situations in which they need to gauge how much dependence they can safely risk. Throughout the course of the relationship, partners need to make iterative and often implicit choices between self-protection (decreasing dependence) and relationship promotion (increasing dependence). Consequently, to risk being in the relationship, people need a system in place that functions to keep them feeling reasonably safe in a context of continued vulnerability. Consistent with this logic, models of attachment and self-esteem assume that people strive to perceive themselves and their social world in ways that allow them to feel protected from harm in an unpredictable world (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997; Mikulincer, Florian, & Hirschberger, 2003).

What types of relationship experiences afford insurance against risk? How is this sense of assurance regulated across the diverse situations that form any relationship? In the next two sections, we describe a conceptual model developed to explain how people resolve the tension between self-protection and relationship promotion inherent in dependence dilemmas. We first consider the broadest situation of dependence—the relationship itself—and stipulate the functional requirements of a risk regulation system. Then we describe how this system adapts itself to meet the circumstances imposed by the level of risk inherent in specific situations. We first develop our arguments at a conceptual level and then document the empirical evidence illustrating how this risk regulation system operates in the context of adult close relationships.

The Risk Regulation System

The central assumption of the model is that negotiating interdependent life requires a cognitive, affective, and behavioral regulatory system for resolving the conflict between the goals of self-protection and relationship promotion. The overarching goal
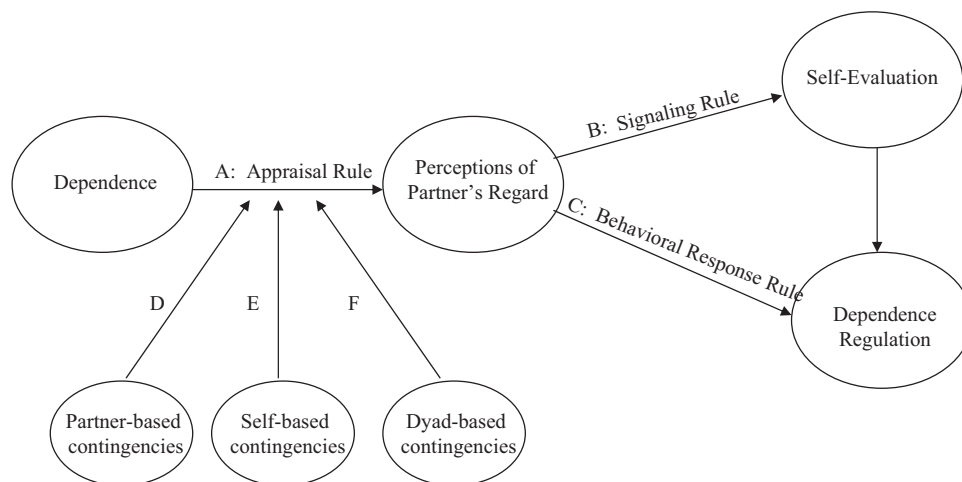
Figure 1. The risk regulation system in relationships.

of this system is to optimize the sense of assurance that is possible given one's relationship circumstances.[1] This sense of assurance is experienced as a sense of safety in one's level of dependence in the relationship—a feeling of relative invulnerability to hurt. To optimize this sense of assurance, this system must function dynamically, shifting the priority given to the goals of avoiding rejection and seeking closeness to accommodate the perceived risks of rejection.

To carry out a dynamic function, this system needs a means of estimating and summarizing the risk of rejection. The model stipulates that confidence in a partner's regard acts as an arbiter that tells people whether it is safe to put self-protection aside and risk thinking and behaving in relationship-promotive ways (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Figure 1 illustrates the operation of this risk regulation system. It illustrates three "if–then" rule systems needed to gauge the risks of rejection and make the general situation of being involved in a relationship feel sufficiently safe. Gauging and regulating rejection risk requires appraisal (Path A), signaling or emotion (Path B), and behavioral response (Path C) rules. These interconnected rule systems operate in concert to prioritize self-protection goals (and the sense of assurance that comes from maintaining distance) when the perceived risks of rejection are high or relationship-promotion goals (and the sense of assurance that comes from feeling connected) when the perceived risks of rejection are low.

The Appraisal System

The general situation of interdependence in Figure 1 refers to the relationship over time. The link between dependence and perceptions of the partner's regard captures the assumption that dependence increases people's need to gauge a partner's regard (Path A in Figure 1). This path captures the operation of an appraisal system—one that makes sense of the overall flow of events. This contingency rule takes the form "if dependent, then gauge acceptance or rejection."

An appraisal system is necessary in romantic relationships because securing a caring and committed partner allows people to put

self-protection aside and risk connection to one specific person (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). To accurately gauge rejection risk, people need to be able to discern whether a chosen partner is willing to meet their needs and commit to them. Paths D through F in Figure 1 capture the supporting "if–then" contingencies governing appraisals of a partner's regard for the self. These paths stipulate that people rely on shared, largely implicit beliefs about what qualities in the partner (Path D), the self (Path E), and the dyad (Path F) indicate a high versus a low likelihood of a partner's acceptance and caring.

If people are to risk connection, the outcome of this appraisal process needs to give them reason to trust in a partner's responsiveness to needs in situations of dependence. Evolutionary and attachment theorists assume that perceived responsiveness to needs is the sine qua non of satisfying interpersonal relationships. Perceived responsiveness is so critical because securing a partner who is motivated to respond to one's needs minimizes the likelihood of rejections that could threaten survival and the successful transmission of one's genes (Bowlby, 1982; P. Gilbert, 2005; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). In fact, evolutionary theorists maintain that specialized cognitive mechanisms evolved to detect whether intimates perceive qualities in the self that could not easily be obtained in alternative relationships. Thus, the perception that others value the self makes them safe to approach in times of difficulty (Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). Consistent with this logic, situational primes that activate belongingness needs sensitize people to cues that suggest which specific others might be capable of responding to these needs (Gardner, Pickett, & Brewer, 2000; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004).

The particular experiences that afford optimistic expectations about responsiveness likely vary across relationships and perhaps across cultures (Berscheid & Regan, 2005). From the perspective of the current model, the common diagnostic that affords confidence in a partner's expected responsiveness to needs is the perception that a partner perceives qualities in the self worth

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[1] We use the term *assurance* to invoke the idea of "confidence in mind or manner" (Mish, 1995, p. 70).

valuing—qualities that are not readily available in other partners. In more independent cultures, this sense of confidence requires the inference that a partner perceives valued traits in the self (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). In more interdependent cultures, this sense of confidence requires the additional inference that a partner's family also values the qualities one brings to the relationship (MacDonald & Jessica, in press).[2]

The Signaling System

The link between perceived regard and self-evaluations (Path B in Figure 1) illustrates the operation of a signaling or emotion system that detects discrepancies between current and desired appraisals of a partner's regard and mobilizes the energy for action (Berscheid, 1983). That is, given the general goal of being uniquely valued by a partner, perceiving signs of a partner's acceptance should feel good, and perceiving rejection should hurt. The contingency rule governing the signaling system takes the form "if accepted or rejected, then internalize."

This rule reflects a basic assumption of the sociometer model of self-esteem. Leary and Baumeister (2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; MacDonald & Leary, 2005) believed that the need to protect against rejection is so important that people evolved a system for reacting to rejection threats. The authors argued that self-esteem is simply a gauge—a "*sociometer*"—that measures a person's perceived likelihood of being accepted or rejected by others. The qualities that people come to value in themselves, such as intelligence or social skills, are valued because those are the qualities that people believe elicit interpersonal acceptance and the likelihood of having their needs met by others.

The sociometer is thought to function such that signs that another's approval is waning diminish self-esteem (Leary, Cottrell, & Misha, 2001; Leary et al., 2003; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Leary et al., 1995). This contingency is so powerful and automatic that state self-esteem can be undermined by ostracism by a stranger (Leary et al., 1995), by a computer in a ball-toss game (Zadro, Williams, & Richardson, 2004), and by the experience of disapproving others activated outside of conscious awareness (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990). Because the detection of and reaction to physical and social pain operate through similar brain and behavior systems, sensitivity to social pain is thought to motivate people to avoid harmful situations and approach safer ones (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). In this sense, the sociometer functions not to preserve self-esteem per se but to protect people from suffering the serious costs of rejection and not having their needs met.

The need for such a signaling system is amplified in romantic relationships because narrowing social connections to focus on one specific partner raises the personal stakes of rejection. In committing himself to Sally, Harry narrows the number of people he can rely on to satisfy his needs and, in so doing, makes his welfare all the more dependent on Sally's actions. In his routine interactions, Harry also does not need to seek acceptance from someone he perceives to be rejecting. However, in his relationship with Sally, he is often caught in the position of being hurt by the person whose acceptance he most desires. Thus, the level of dependence necessitated by a relationship constrains people's capacity to fulfill their needs in important ways. Imagining a permanent separation from a partner even heightens the accessibility of death-related thoughts,

which suggests that people's basic sense of physical well-being is tied to their relationships (Mikulincer, Florian, Birnbaum, & Malishkovitz, 2002).

Given all that is at stake, the signal that is conveyed by this rule system needs to be sufficiently strong to mobilize action (Berscheid, 1983). Perceiving rejection or drops in a partner's acceptance should hurt and threaten people's general and desired conceptions of themselves as being valuable, efficacious, and worthy of interpersonal connection (Baumeister, 1993; Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004; Taylor & Brown, 1988). By making rejection aversive, this signaling system motivates people to avoid situations in which relationship partners are likely to be unresponsive and needs for connectedness are likely to be frustrated. In contrast, perceiving acceptance should affirm people's sense of themselves as being good and valuable, mobilizing the desire for greater connection and the likelihood of having one's needs met by a partner.

The Behavioral Response System

The link between perceived regard and dependence-regulating behavior captures the assumption that the threat and social pain of rejection in turn shape people's willingness to think and behave in ways that promote dependence and connectedness (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). This path illustrates the operation of a behavioral response system—one that proactively minimizes both the likelihood and the pain of future rejection experiences by making increased dependence contingent on the perception of acceptance (Path C in Figure 1). As the direct and mediated paths illustrate, this system may be triggered directly, by the experience of acceptance or rejection, and indirectly, through resulting gains or drops in self-esteem. The contingency rule governing this system is "if feeling accepted or rejected, then regulate dependence."

The proposed model assumes that the behavioral response system operates to ensure that people only risk as much future dependence as they feel is reasonably safe given recent experience. Suggesting that felt acceptance is a relatively automatic trigger to safety and the possibility of connection, unconsciously primed thoughts of security heighten empathy for others (Mikulincer et al., 2001), diminish people's tendency to derogate out-group members (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2001), and increase people's desire to seek support from others in dealing with a personal crisis (Pierce & Lydon, 1998). In contrast, experiencing rejection automatically triggers the perception of risk and the desire to distance oneself from the relationship. MacDonald and Leary (2005) argued that rejection elicits a social pain akin to physical pain to trigger

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[2] Because we focus so heavily on the goal of feeling positively regarded and loved by a partner, some readers might wonder whether the proposed model contends that people care more about feeling valued and loved than they care about actually being loved and valued. This is not the case. The model assumes that people care most about actually being loved and valued by specific others. Given the biases inherent in social perception and people's tendency to treat social perception as if it was veridical (Griffin & Ross, 1991; Kenny, 1994), people are not likely to believe they are loved unless they feel loved. For this reason, we argue that feeling positively regarded by one's partner is a necessary precondition for putting aside self-protection goals and satisfying connectedness needs within specific relationships.
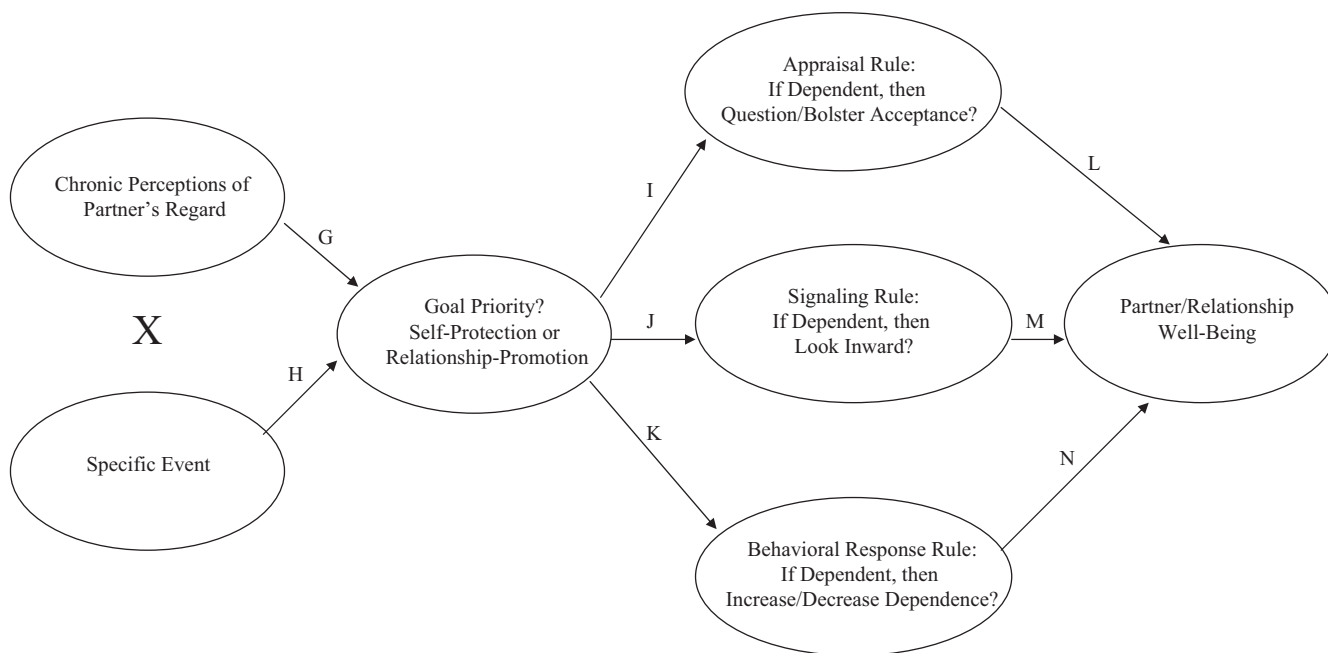
Figure 2. Individual differences in the operation of the risk regulation system.

increased physical distance between oneself and the source of the pain. For instance, people respond to ostracism from strangers by aggressing against those who ostracized them, which suggests that the need to distance oneself from painful interactions is a relatively basic and automatic one (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001).

Given the general operation of such a dependence regulation system and the heightened need to protect against romantic rejection, people should implicitly regulate and structure dependence on a specific partner in ways that allow them to minimize the short-term likelihood and long-term potential pain of rejection (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

When a partner's general regard is in question and rejection seems more likely, people should tread cautiously, reserve judgment, and limit future dependence on the partner. A first line of defense might involve limiting the situations people are willing to enter within their relationships. Efforts to delimit dependence by choosing one's situations carefully might involve conscious decisions to seek support elsewhere, disclose less, or follow exchange norms. These strategies minimize the chance of being in situations in which a partner might prove to be unresponsive. A second line of defense might involve shifting the symbolic value attached to the partner and the relationship itself. Such efforts might entail less deliberative shifts in the way people construe their partner's behavior and qualities, such as becoming less willing to excuse specific transgressions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990) or coming to see a partner's habitual lateness as maddening rather than endearing (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). By diminishing their partner's value as a source of connection and minimizing the pain of rejection in advance, people can protect a sense of their own worthiness of interpersonal connection against loss.

When confident of a partner's general regard, people can more safely risk increased dependence in the future. They can enter into situations in which the partner has control over their immediate outcomes, forgive transgressions, attach greater value to their partner's qualities, and risk a stronger sense of commitment to the partner and relationship.[3]

Individual Differences in the Operation of the Risk Regulation System

We are not arguing that all people are equally sensitive to the "if–then" contingencies underlying the operation of this system at all times and in all situations within a specific relationship. Instead, the proposed model assumes that the sensitivity of the risk regulation system adapts itself to suit specific relationship circumstances. Figure 2 illustrates how feeling more or less positively regarded by a specific partner interacts with event features to control the sensitivity of appraisal (Path I), signaling (Path J), and dependence regulation rules (Path K).

In this model, *perceptions of the partner's regard* refers to people's general or cross-situational expectations. *Situations of dependence* refers to the objective or "given" structure of specific events (Kelley, 1979). The sociometer model assumes that drops in felt acceptance are more motivating than increments (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Therefore, the events of primary interest are ones that highlight the costs rather than the gains of dependence.

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[3] In depicting perceived regard as a pivotal causal variable, we are not arguing that it is the only causal factor influencing self-evaluations or dependence regulation. Other factors, such as people's chronic dispositions and attachment histories (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) or the desire to protect existing commitments (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993), are undoubtedly important. The point is that perceived regard is a critical, often overlooked, causal force that helps explain the role of these sources of influence. We develop this argument further as we proceed.

Negative events, such as a partner's intemperate remark, should be more strongly associated with the activation of "if–then" contingency rules than positive events, such as a partner's gentle touch. These situations can be anticipatory (i.e., the possibility that a partner might be unresponsive to one's needs) or experienced in nature (i.e., the actuality of perceiving a partner as hurtful or rejecting).

The multiplicative function in Figure 2 illustrates the assumption that chronic perceptions of a partner's regard interact with specific event features to control the extent to which people categorize or code specific events as situations of risk. To the extent that Sally is unsure of Harry's regard, even the mundane choice of one movie over another could make concerns about dependence salient. However, to the extent that Sally is more confident of Harry's regard, she might only begin to entertain thoughts about her vulnerability to his actions when they try to negotiate more serious decisions in their relationship, such as deciding whose financial philosophy to follow. Once identified as such, the possibility of rejection inherent in such "dependent" situations activates a situated conflict between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals, heightening the in-the-moment need for a sense of assurance or safety.

The activation of the need for a sense of assurance or invulnerability to harm then triggers the appraisal, signaling, and behavior response systems (either individually or in concert). The model stipulates that a person's habitual means of optimizing feelings of assurance within the relationship is revealed in the idiosyncratic or *signature* ways this person tailors or calibrates the operation of these rules to prioritize self-protection or relationship-promotion goals in specific situations of dependence (Paths I through K in Figure 2). Mirroring this procedural emphasis, developmental scholars argue that children develop behavioral strategies to maintain a sense of safety in interactions with caregivers that are specialized to circumstance (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Social cognition scholars also argue that strategic goals followed in relationships, such as cooperativeness or achievement, are activated when significant other representations are primed (Baldwin, 1992; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003).

In using the term *signature,* we expand the metaphor for personality developed by Mischel and Shoda (1995). They argued that personality is best conceptualized in terms of consistent, situation-specific patterns of behavior, not in terms of stable, cross-situational tendencies (Mischel & Morf, 2003). In their model, the psychological features of the situation correspond to characteristics of an interaction partner in a particular context, and "personality" is revealed in the way people tailor their cognition, affect, and behavior with interaction partners in certain types of social situations (e.g., a boss conveying criticism, a friend behaving competitively, a spouse conveying praise). We posit a similar Person × Situation structure in relationships. However, we define a person's relationship-specific "personality" in the way people tailor appraisal, emotion, and behavioral rules to minimize the level of rejection risk given the perceived features of the partner and the dependent situation.

Perceived Regard and the Situated Pursuit of Assurance

For people who generally feel less positively regarded by a specific partner, the goal of feeling valued and discerning the partner's caring is likely to be chronically activated (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). The chronic accessibility of this goal should sensitize people who feel less positively regarded to rejection threats, shaping the "if–then" contingencies that are activated in ways that put a premium on self-protection.

Why is this the case? General expectations of rejection, such as those embodied in low self-esteem, make specific rejection experiences all the more painful and all the more motivating (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). For people who generally anticipate interpersonal rejection, the need to feel and be more included is sufficiently strong that their state self-esteem is sensitive to even unconsciously activated rejection cues (Sommer & Baumeister, 2002) or signs of a stranger's disapproval (Nezlek, Kowalski, Leary, Blevins, & Holgate, 1997).

For people who generally feel less positively regarded by a specific partner (i.e., lows), situated rejection experiences hurt more because they pose a greater proportional loss to a more precarious, generalized sense of their own worthiness of interpersonal connection. Consequently, such individuals are in particular need of a self-protectively weighted or prevention-oriented rule system (Higgins, 1996)—one that quickly detects rejection, strongly signals the possibility of further hurt, and motivates them to take defensive action sooner rather than later (Pietrzak, Downey, & Ayduk, 2005). Thus, chronic doubts about Harry's regard require that Sally act as though she believes that minimizing the pain of rejection provides greater assurance or safety from harm than risking closeness. In a functional sense, being primed to see rejection is likely the best means of avoiding even more threatening situations (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). For lows, the "if" part of their contingencies should operate like a hair trigger, setting a low threshold for the identification of threat. Sally's fear of being hurt by Harry should cause her to vigilantly attend to situational cues that categorize events in terms of dependence. She should also be quick to perceive rejection so she might prevent herself from getting closer and even more hurt. A regulatory system that functions to prioritize self-protection goals best affords people who generally feel less valued some minimal sense of continued assurance in the relationship.

This general line of reasoning is echoed in classic formulations of approach–avoidance conflicts and modern characterizations of rejection sensitivity, anxiety disorders, and self-esteem. In translating Dollard and Miller's (1950) analysis of approach–avoidance conflicts, Epstein (1982) made the paradoxical point that people can protect themselves from experiencing fear by making a particular goal or state more fearful. Put in technical terms, Sally's readiness to perceive rejection should increase her avoidance gradient, keeping her farther from situations that might prove to be even more hurtful. Downey and Feldman (1996) made a conceptually related point in their analysis of rejection sensitivity. These authors argued that chronic differences in the tendency to expect and perceive rejection reflect the operation of the defensive motivational system (Pietrzak et al., 2005). This system is triggered by the goal of avoiding threatening or dangerous situations (Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1990). Similarly, Mineka and Sutton (1992) argued that chronically high levels of anxiety automatically direct people's attention toward threatening stimuli so that they might avoid such situations. For instance, threatening words, such as

injury or *criticized*, capture attention automatically for people troubled by generalized anxiety (MacLeod, Mathews, & Tata, 1986). Similarly, Leary and Baumeister (2000) argued that the sociometer is more reactive to rejection for people who are chronically low in self-esteem than it is for people who are chronically high in self-esteem.

Rather than evaluating the evidence in an evenhanded way, people who feel less positively regarded should respond to situations of dependence by becoming more concerned about concluding incorrectly that their partner cares about them (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Taylor, 1991). In appraising the meaning of ongoing events, people who feel less valued should be risk averse, more ready to generalize from signs of rejection than to trust signs of acceptance. They should also be readily hurt by perceiving rejection, questioning their own value and worth in the face of acute rejections. Given the greater hurt, people who generally feel less positively regarded should then react to acute rejections in ways that minimize the potential for future hurt. Such efforts might involve limiting dependence by becoming less willing to self-disclose, to seek support, or to put oneself in situations in which one's outcomes are dependent on the partner's actions. Protective efforts could also involve diminishing the importance of the connection itself—by devaluing the partner and relationship, turning to alternative relationships or sources of support, or lashing out in ways that communicate such diminished sentiments.

For people who generally feel more positively regarded by a specific partner (i.e., highs), there is little need for such a defensively calibrated rule system. For them, specific rejections pose a smaller proportional loss to a comparably rich resource. Instead, the goal of maintaining the desired level of confidence in the partner's positive regard and caring is likely to prevail (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). A regulatory system that functions to prioritize relationship-promotion goals better affords highs a continued sense of assurance or safety in the relationship. In other words, confidence in Sally's regard allows Harry to act as though he believes that seeking closeness affords the greatest safety from harm.

In appraising the meaning of specific situations of dependence, people who generally feel more positively regarded set a high threshold for detecting rejection. Rather than being primed to see rejection, highs appraise and respond to most situations of dependence in ways that dispel unwanted rejection concerns and uncertainties and protect the desired sense of confidence in their partner's positive regard and caring (Gagne & Lydon, 2004; Murray & Holmes, 1993, 1994). In particular, specific situations of dependence should activate "if–then" contingencies that link potential threats to motivated cognitive processes that bolster and protect perceptions of the partner's acceptance and caring. Even in situations in which they feel rejected, general expectations of partner acceptance should dull the sting of specific hurts, protecting self-esteem from most experiences of rejection. In fact, general expectations of acceptance should give highs reason to believe that seeking greater closeness to the partner will minimize rather than exacerbate the likelihood of future hurts. Consequently, people who generally feel more positively regarded should respond to situated rejections in ways that foster greater dependence.

The Situated Operation of the Risk Regulation System

How might such dynamics play out in a specific situation of dependence, such as a conflict? If Harry generally doubts Sally's regard, such situations remind him that depending on Sally is risky. An insecure Harry should maintain some sense of safety in the face of the acute tension between wanting to avoid rejection and wanting to be close by activating procedural rules that put self-protection at a premium. He should perceive rejection in specific episodes (Path I, "if dependent situation, then question acceptance"), feel hurt and personally diminished (Path J, "if feeling acutely rejected, then internalize"), and respond to such hurts by diminishing his dependence on Sally (Path K, "if feeling acutely rejected, then decrease dependence"). If Harry felt more confident of Sally's regard, he might instead resolve such situated tensions in favor of relationship-promotion goals. A secure Harry should perceive evidence of acceptance in such episodes (Path I, "if dependent situation, then bolster acceptance"), not be as seriously hurt when he feels acutely rejected (Path J, "if feeling acutely rejected, then externalize"), and increase his dependence on Sally in situations that highlight rejection risk (Path K, "if feeling acutely rejected, then increase dependence").

The specific translation of these "if–then" rules is likely to depend on features of each partner's expectations of caring and features of the situation they face. Although people who feel less positively regarded should generally set a lower threshold for perceiving rejection, the events that activate the greatest concern should be highly specific to the couple. For instance, some people may experience chronic difficulties negotiating conflicts in their relationship. For others, conflicts may be relatively easily resolved, whereas situations in which one partner solicits the other's support may be more threatening. In the former case, conflicts might activate concerns about dependence (e.g., "When I want something different than my partner does, my partner will reject me"), whereas occasions when support is solicited may activate more optimistic assumptions (e.g., "If I have a problem at work, my partner will try to solve it"). In the latter case, soliciting support might activate concerns about rejection (e.g., "If I want my partner to listen to my problems, my partner will ignore me"), whereas conflicts may not.

The specific behavioral strategies that couples adopt to optimize feelings of assurance or safety in the face of acute rejection concerns should also be tailored to meet the constraints imposed by features of each partner's expectations and the situation they face. People who generally feel more positively regarded by their partner may differ in their habitual means of increasing closeness in situations in which they feel rejected. For some, the activation of rejection concerns may prompt the desire to express their needs more clearly. For others, the activation of rejection concerns may activate caregiving behaviors directed toward the partner. Similarly, some people who generally feel less positively regarded may restore feelings of assurance through strategic efforts to reduce dependence. For some, this might involve derogating the partner, a relatively direct strategy. However, for others, such strategies might be ineffective because their partner responds to such behavior in ways that trigger conflicts, and thus this approach would further exacerbate rejection anxieties. In such circumstances, dependence reduction strategies might involve limiting conversation to superficialities or turning to friends for support.

This new approach to understanding individual differences in relationship functioning locates the core of a sense of assurance in the habitual strategies people adopt to optimize a sense of invulnerability to harm in dependence dilemmas. In his seminal work, Bowlby (1982) argued that the attachment system evolved to protect infants from harm by fostering physical proximity to caregivers—that is, by satisfying the goal of "*felt security*" (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Early experiences of feeling more or less safe in the presence of specific caregivers are thought to determine people's capacity to experience "felt security" in adult relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In this sense, "felt security" is a property of a person's disposition. Although we recognize the importance of generalized expectations, the proposed model underscores the role that specific expectations of a partner's regard play in regulating how people think and behave in the interdependence dilemmas posed by adult relationships.

By advancing a social–psychological analysis of how a sense of assurance—our translation of the "felt security" concept—is optimized in adult close relationships, we integrate central tenets of attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), the sociometer model (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), and interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979, 1983). The risk regulation model we offer advances these perspectives by arguing that confidence in a partner's regard activates "if–then" rules that sustain a sense of assurance by prioritizing relationship-promotion goals and seeking connectedness. In contrast, doubts about a partner's regard activate "if–then" rules that sustain a sense of assurance by prioritizing self-protection goals and avoiding rejection.

Attachment and interdependence theorists both conceptualize relationships as a process of mutual influence (Kelley, 1983; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). If the model we offer provides a meaningful way of conceptualizing how people optimize a sense of assurance, then the idiosyncratic contingencies that govern people's cognition, affect, and behavior should have interpersonal and relationship consequences. Paths L through N in Figure 2 capture the potential for such effects. These paths illustrate the possibility that the self-protective or relationship-promotive contingencies evident in one partner's thoughts and behaviors should influence the contingencies evident in the other partner's thoughts and behaviors. The risk regulation model we present assumes that relationships are most satisfying and resilient when people set aside self-protection and promote dependence.

Organizational Overview

We first evaluate the evidence for the operation of the appraisal, signaling, and behavioral response rules within the general situation of relationship dependence. We then examine individual differences in how people calibrate and apply these rules in responding to specific situations of dependence. Next we detail applications of the model by illustrating how the "if–then" rules predict future relationship well-being. We also clarify enduring issues in the literature, including why those people who need relationships the most are likely to think and behave in ways that undermine this need. We conclude by integrating alternative theoretical perspectives and by pointing to limitations in the literature and future research directions.[4]

The Risk Regulation System: Normative Contingency Rules

In this section, we address two questions. First, is monitoring a partner's regard a basic contingency of romantic life (Path A)? Second, does feeling more or less positively regarded by a specific partner have normative consequences for self-evaluations (Path B) and dependence regulation (Path C) that are evident across people involved in close relationships?

The Appraisal System: If Dependent, Then Gauge Acceptance

Consistent with models of attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), interdependence (Kelley, 1979), and self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), the model presented in Figures 1 and 2 assumes that people need to convince themselves that their partner sees reason to be caring and responsive toward them. To support this inference, people need to believe that their partner sees qualities in them worth valuing—qualities that are not readily available in others.[5] Consistent with this logic, people in dating relationships report wanting their partner to see them as more physically attractive than they see themselves (Swann et al., 2002). People in dating and marital relationships also report wanting their partner to see them more positively than they see themselves on qualities of interpersonal value, such as warmth and tolerance (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Believing that a partner perceives these hoped-for selves affords greater confidence in that partner's love and continuing commitment (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). In fact, people in dating and marital relationships report greater confidence in their partner's continued love when they believe their partner sees them more positively than they see themselves (Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001).

In arguing for the importance of feeling uniquely valued, the proposed model does not assume that people are motivated to overstate how much a partner values them. Instead, it assumes that people strive to be correct in reaching the desired inference that their partner sees special qualities in them. People may approach the early stages of a relationship with a deliberative mind-set—conscientiously tracking the available evidence for signs of a partner's caring (Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995). However, once a person is confident of a partner's caring, appraisal processes may shift to the implemental task of sustaining this conclusion.

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[4] Given the voluminous nature of the literature on interpersonal relationships, it is also necessary to delimit the scope of this article in two main respects. Although the proposed model has implications for furthering an understanding of the precursors to relationship initiation, the model focuses on already initiated relationships. Rich conceptualizations of the precursors of initiation and related phenomena, such as unrequited love, are available elsewhere (e.g., Baumeister, Wotman, & Stillwell, 1993; Berscheid & Regan, 2005). Although we draw heavily on attachment theory and research to support the arguments offered, available space also precludes a detailed discussion of the developmental origins of felt security and its varied consequences. Rich descriptions of these processes have been provided by Mikulincer and Shaver (2003), Fraley and Shaver (2000), and Hazan and Shaver (1994).

[5] Although the theme of appraisal is central to work on close relationships, no review to date has specified how people actually learn about a partner's acceptance.

In summary, the model stipulates that people monitor a partner's regard and caring not just to gauge rejection risks (a kind of prevention motivation) but also to secure acceptance (a kind of promotion motivation). Consistent with the importance placed on partner-specific expectations of acceptance, relationships generally thrive when people both feel and are more valued by their partner. For instance, feeling cared for by a partner is the strongest predictor of attachment security in specific relationships (Davila & Sargent, 2003; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). In both dating and marital relationships, people also report greater satisfaction and less conflict the more positively they believe their partner sees their interpersonal qualities (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000), the more loved they feel (Murray et al., 2001), and the more positively their partner actually regards them (Murray et al., 1996a). People also report similar relationship benefits when their partner feels more positively regarded.[6]

The Operation of the Appraisal System: Supporting If–Then Contingency Rules

A basic inferential dilemma exists throughout relationships: Without any direct means of establishing insight into the contents of another's consciousness, how can people gauge whether a specific partner perceives qualities worth valuing in them? The existing evidence suggests that people solve this puzzle by invoking shared, largely implicit beliefs about the contingencies underlying interpersonal acceptance (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). This set of contingencies links the likelihood of acceptance to qualities in the partner, the self, and the dyad.

Partner-based contingencies. In gauging acceptance, people rely in part on judgments about whether a partner possesses the kinds of qualities that foster responsiveness. Evolutionary perspectives on the formation of pair bonds maintain that people are drawn to others who are attractive, warm, and cooperatively motivated because such traits signal a willingness to form social connections (Gangestad & Simpson, 2000; Hazan & Diamond, 2000). However, the perception of desirable traits in the partner is a necessary but not sufficient condition for confident inferences about a partner's caring. Perceiving Sally as kind and responsive has little value for Harry if Sally is not motivated to be kind to him. Consequently, people need to gauge their partner's likely personality or demeanor within the context of their relationship.

To assess such *interpersonal* dispositions, people rely on implicit theories about the value of self-sacrificing behaviors (e.g., "If partner sacrifices, then acceptance"). Interdependence theorists argue that people understand that some partner behaviors are more diagnostic than others (Kelley, 1979). Consider the attributions Sally might make if Harry reveals embarrassing information about himself. His willingness to make himself vulnerable signals his commitment to her and gives Sally greater reason to trust him. Similarly, if Harry volunteers to do chores that he and Sally dislike, he demonstrates his selfless concern for her welfare. However, Sally would learn little about his responsiveness if he chose those chores that he liked and she disliked.

As relationships develop, people rely on such augmentation and discounting attribution principles to draw inferences about their partner's caring (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley, 1979). For instance, people report greater trust in their partner's caring when they witness signs of their partner's commitment, such as their partner's selfless responsiveness to their needs or willingness to excuse their transgressions (Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). People also are more likely to feel cared for when their partner discloses personally revealing information over mundane facts (see Reis & Shaver, 1988, for a review). A partner's willingness to provide support for one's own revealing disclosures similarly reinforces feelings of trust (Collins & Feeney, 2004). Witnessing Harry's responsiveness should give Sally greater reason to trust both in Harry's benevolent nature and, more important, in his caring for her.

Self-based contingencies. In gauging a partner's regard, people cannot escape the biases imposed by their own self-views (Griffin & Ross, 1991; Kenny, 1994; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). People with a history of inconsistent attachment experiences possess less positive and more uncertain beliefs about themselves than people with a more secure attachment history (Collins & Read, 1990). Similar self-doubts characterize people troubled by low global self-esteem (J. D. Campbell, 1990) or rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Attachment theorists argue that people use such generalized models to gauge current relationship contingencies (Collins & Read, 1994; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). In particular, people seem to operate on the basis of contingencies that link the possession of desirable qualities to interpersonal acceptance and undesirable qualities to rejection (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996).

Knowing that the regard of others is earned, people troubled by self-doubts may have trouble understanding why a partner who must see many faults in them and who seems superior to them would really care for them or remain committed. In both dating and marital relationships, people with low self-esteem underestimate how positively their partner sees them on specific traits (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and even underestimate how much their partner loves them (Murray et al., 2001). People who are more sensitive to rejection or more preoccupied in attachment style also underestimate their dating partner's relationship satisfaction and commitment (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Tucker & Anders, 1999). In contrast, confidently held, positive self-views provide a readily accessible, compelling rationale for a partner's caring.

Dyadic-based contingencies. People also seem to rely heavily on dyadic cues to gauge a partner's regard. These are cues that suggest a partner is likely to be accepting because he or she falls within one's "league." To feel loved, people need to believe that they are just as good a person as their partner (Murray et al., 2005). Accordingly, people treat the perception of similarity as a cue to acceptance because similarity allows them to justify why their partner might value and care for them (Condon & Crano, 1988). After all, Harry is not likely to feel confident in Sally's apparent affections if he thinks her greater physical attractiveness or superior social skills put her effectively out of his league.

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[6] The proposed model does not claim that feeling understood by a partner is unimportant (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Swann, Hixon, & De La Ronde, 1992). Instead, it assumes that people need to be able to pinpoint (good) reasons why their partner would value them overall before they are likely to believe that their partner would tolerate their more negative qualities. In fact, for low self-esteem people there may be special value in believing that their partner sees their faults but values them nonetheless.

Supporting this logic, social exchange theorists reason that people possess implicit theories about the importance of matching a partner's worth on consensually valued qualities and pin their hopes on people who are perceived to be of similar net social worth (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Murstein, 1970; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). Evolutionary theorists also believe that the cognitive system has evolved specific mechanisms to automatically detect violations of fair exchange principles (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Even people's images of an ideal romantic partner are constrained by their self-perceptions on most dimensions, reflecting the implicit assumption that one can find greater happiness by aspiring to a partner within one's league (L. Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Fletcher, 2001).

A large literature suggests that the perception of similarity is indeed one of the most powerful triggers of interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Reis, 1998). People express more interest in pursuing relationships with dating partners whose levels of physical attractiveness and social desirability match their own (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971). Rather than fading with increasing interdependence, the heuristic value of perceiving similarity in worth only increases over time. Couples in stable relationships believe their own level of physical attractiveness matches their partner's attractiveness (Feingold, 1988). Satisfied married intimates even inflate perceptions of similarity, exaggerating how much their spouse shares the same traits, values, and feelings (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002).

In situations that might activate unsettling concerns about inferiority, satisfied dating and married intimates react to the threat posed by one partner outperforming the other by perceiving such imbalances as complementary—that is, by seeing one partner's success as relevant to that partner but irrelevant to the self (Beach et al., 1998; Beach, Whitaker, Jones, & Tesser, 2001). People are sufficiently concerned with being outperformed by close others that they are less willing to provide close than distant others with performance-enhancing information (Pemberton & Sedikides, 2001). Conversely, when romantic partners conclude that their contributions to the relationship are unequal, they report less satisfaction and commitment (Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Sprecher, 1988, 2001).[7]

Accuracy of Perception

Given the inherent difficulty in discerning the contents of another's mind, people rely on specific contingencies to gauge a partner's positive regard and love. Reliance on such rules does provide reasonable insight. In dating and marital relationships, people who believe their partner sees them more positively on specific traits are better regarded (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). People who feel more loved also tend to be more loved (Murray et al., 2001). Clouding this level of acuity, people also assume that their partner sees as much (or as little) to value in them as they see in themselves. Consequently, people's capacity to be confident of their partner's regard is constrained as much by their dispositions as by any reality in the relationship.

A Normative Rule System?

The literature reviewed supports the contention that dependence motivates people to gauge a partner's regard. Is an appraisal rule a necessary component of a risk regulation system? At first glance, low self-esteem people seem to be an exception to this rule. In both dating and marital relationships, they underestimate how positively their partner regards their traits (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and how much their partner loves them (Murray et al., 2001). Rather than seeking positive regard, perhaps low self-esteem people put greater priority on verifying a negative self-image. In fact, low self-esteem people express greater feelings of intimacy when their spouse verifies their self-image on concrete traits (Swann et al., 1992).

The bulk of the existing evidence suggests that the insecurities of low self-esteem people arise despite their desire to establish confidence in a partner's positive regard and love. Feeling valued by a specific partner is likely to be more important for low than for high self-esteem people because general anxieties about rejection leave low self-esteem people feeling deprived of secure connections in other relationships as well (Leary et al., 1995). Moreover, even low self-esteem people want their partner to see them more positively than they see themselves when it comes to the traits valued most in relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Swann et al., 2002).

In experimental situations in which low self-esteem people are led to believe that their partner actually is within their league, they also express just as much confidence in their dating partner's acceptance and love as do high self-esteem people. For instance, low self-esteem people react to perceiving new flaws in their partner by reporting greater confidence in their partner's acceptance (Murray et al., 2005). Rather than being intractable, their insecurities stem in part from remediable feelings of inferiority to the partner. The finding that low self-esteem people readily identify reasons to trust in their partner's acceptance suggests that they are motivated to find reason to feel valued and accepted. However, they have difficulty constructing the rationale necessary to sustain optimistic perceptions in normal circumstances (Kunda, 1990).

Is constructing a rationale for a partner's love necessary for everyone? Attachment theorists argue that people develop generalized expectations of others as more or less accepting through early interactions with caregivers (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). If the lessons learned in such interactions are sufficiently positive, might this alone be enough to foster confidence in a specific partner's positive regard and love?[8]

Growing evidence suggests that, rather than exhibiting a style of attachment that is stable across relationship contexts, people exhibit different attachment "styles" with different significant others (Baldwin, Keelan, Fehr, Enns, & Koh-Rangarajoo, 1996; Cook, 2000; Cozzarelli, Hoekstra, & Bylsma, 2000; Overall, Fletcher, &

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[7] Consistent with the emphasis on the reassuring value of perceiving similarity, people who are anxious–ambivalent in attachment style and, thus, particularly in need of relationships and anxious about interpersonal rejection are likely to assume even greater similarity between themselves and others than people who are less anxious about rejection (Mikulincer, Orbach, & Iavnieli, 1998).

[8] The argument that dispositional security may obviate the need for specific secure representations may strike some readers as a particularly strong form of attachment theory. We are sympathetic to this view, as many attachment scholars would argue that even people who are dispositionally secure in attachment style pay attention to relevant, specific behavioral evidence (Bowlby, 1982; Collins & Read, 1994).

Friesen, 2003). Such specificity points to the normative and adaptive importance of forming expectations about a specific partner's availability and responsiveness. Reanalyses of existing data further buttress this point. If dispositional security can substitute for partner-specific expectations of caring, the association between believing that a partner regards one's traits positively and feeling loved should be substantially reduced for secure types. The association between feeling positively regarded and reporting greater satisfaction should be similarly diminished. However, regardless of people's dispositional attachment style, intimates report feeling more loved and being more satisfied the more positively they believe their partner regards their traits (Murray, 2005). This suggests that justifying perceptions of a partner's love is indeed a normative goal and that partner-specific expectations are a critical feature of people's relationship representations.

The Signaling System: If Feeling Accepted or Rejected, Then Internalize

As people update and revise their perceptions of how accepting or rejecting a partner is likely to be, do such appraisals turn people inward and shape the inferences they draw about their own worthiness of love and care? The lessons conveyed by people's social environment shape their sense of self-worth from infancy well into adulthood (Baldwin, 1992; Bowlby, 1982; Cooley, 1902; Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Mead, 1934; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979). For instance, across casual acquaintanceships, close friendships, parent–child relationships, and romantic relationships, people's views of themselves mirror the image they perceive in the eyes of others (Felson, 1989; Kenny, 1994; McNulty & Swann, 1994).

The Romantic Relationship Context

The practical and symbolic gains of eliciting acceptance and the costs of rejection are magnified in close relationships because this context necessitates such high levels of dependence on another's willingness to meet one's needs. People's sense of themselves is so sensitive to interpersonal ties that simply being exposed to a novel person who resembles a significant other shifts the content of the working self-concept to resemble the sense of self that is experienced in the presence of the significant other (Hinkley & Andersen, 1996). In both Eastern and Western cultures, which are thought to differ in the importance of relationships for self-esteem, people with more negative peer and family relations report lower self-esteem (Abe, 2004).

Expectations of a partner's acceptance can be internalized and shape self-esteem over repeated interactions and experiences within a specific romantic relationship. Intimates who believe their hoped-for selves are not well understood or nurtured by their partner report greater discrepancy between their actual and ideal selves over time (Drigotas et al., 1999; Ruvolo & Brennan, 1997). The opposite is true for people who feel more affirmed. Similarly, dating intimates who believe their partner sees them relatively negatively on specific interpersonal qualities see themselves more negatively on these traits over time (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Being the object of a partner's relatively negative appraisals even decreases self-esteem and attachment security over time (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b). The opposite is the case for

people who feel (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and actually are more valued (Murray et al., 1996b). People who have suffered the dissolution of a dating relationship or marriage (especially those who did not want the relationship to end) report experiencing great personal pain and anxiety about their worthiness of love (Gotlib & Hammen, 1992; Gray & Silver, 1990). Even people who report having had an unrequited love describe the experience as causing them to question their worth and value as a relationship partner (Baumeister et al., 1993).

As these varied examples illustrate, interdependent exchanges with a romantic partner strongly influence the inferences people draw about the value of the qualities they possess. People implicitly assume that others will seek them out only to the extent that they possess qualities of value to others (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Such interdependent exchanges likely constrain people's assessments of their likelihood of soliciting love. Consequently, perceiving rejection hurts not just because it thwarts people's general desire to be included (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Instead, feeling less than fully valued by one's partner especially hurts because of its symbolic message—it raises the specter of a future absent of social connection.

A Normative Rule System?

The literature reviewed suggests that perceiving a partner's acceptance or rejection modifies people's self-evaluations. Is a signaling rule necessary within a risk regulation system? If the lessons learned in early interactions are sufficiently positive, might this be enough to protect people's self-esteem against later experiences with less accepting others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003)? If this were the case, the tendency for people who feel more valued by a specific partner to report higher self-esteem should be noticeably reduced for people who are more dispositionally secure in attachment style. Contrary to this suggestion, married intimates who feel less positively regarded by their spouse report lower self-esteem regardless of attachment style (Murray, 2005). Further evidence suggests that the self-esteem of people who claim not to need or want social ties still is sensitive to social contingencies. People who are high in attachment-related avoidance report higher self-esteem when they are led to believe that others will be accepting of them (Carvallo & Gabriel, 2006). Being rejected also threatens state self-esteem for people who claim their sense of self is not contingent on others (Leary et al., 2003).

The Behavioral Response System: If Feeling Accepted or Rejected, Then Regulate Dependence

Given the symbolic stakes, people should regulate a sense of connection to others in ways that optimize feelings of assurance within this context of continued vulnerability. Doubts about a partner's regard should activate self-protection goals—fostering thoughts and behaviors that decrease dependence and minimize the short-term risk and long-term pain of rejection. In contrast, confidence in a partner's regard should activate relationship-promotion goals—fostering thoughts and behaviors that increase dependence and heighten the risk of rejection.

The pervasiveness of dependence regulation effects emerged first in the literature in the *reciprocity of liking* principle (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). The phenomenon of people liking those

who like them is so robust that Kenny (1994) described it as a *cultural truism*. This effect is usually explained in terms of social exchange: Liking is reciprocated because it is rewarding to be liked.[9] However, this logic does not fully explain the breadth of these data.

In the platonic relationships typically examined, reciprocity of liking increases as relationships deepen in interdependence (Kenny, 1994). People also assume much more reciprocity of liking than actually exists (Kenny, 1994). Neither of these effects follows easily from social exchange logic. Perceiving another's liking should decrease in reinforcement value as partners become more interdependent and more familiar. Also, distorting another's liking should not convey the practical rewards and reinforcements that actually being liked provides. The assumption that people first need some sense of confidence in another's regard before they allow themselves to risk closeness anticipates both of these effects. As interdependence (and the negative consequences of rejection) increases, people should become all the more in need of the kind of psychological assurance provided by perceiving another's positive regard.

Consistent with this logic, attachment theorists believe that finding that a significant other is not available or responsive in times of crisis is sufficiently self-threatening that such experiences can effectively deactivate proximity-seeking behaviors (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). For instance, when infants' attempts to elicit care go unmet, they develop avoidant behavioral patterns in stressful situations, actively diverting attention away from their caregivers (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). In adulthood, people who have suffered hurt feelings at the hands of specific others report that the incident caused them to restrict or sever the nature of their relationship with the transgressor (Leary, Springer, Negel, Ansell, & Evans, 1998). When the general risks of relationship loss are experimentally primed, dating intimates become less trusting of their partner. They see their partner's past transgressions as more serious in nature, and they become less willing to believe excuses for these transgressions (Boon & Holmes, 1999).

People also report greater feelings of closeness to a partner in a specific interaction when they perceive that person to be more accepting of their self-disclosures (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). However, people report feeling less close when the recipient of such self-disclosures is perceived to be less accepting. People are also more willing to offer help that puts them at a disadvantage when they believe a prospective relationship partner is available for a deeper, more caring relationship than when they believe a partner is available for only a more superficial, exchange-based relationship (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986). People who are highly socially anxious and anticipate rejection in most interpersonal contexts also report behaving in a cold, distant way toward others (Alden & Phillips, 1990).

In terms of the qualities people attribute to a partner—the social inference that is perhaps most critical for establishing secure connections—people in both dating and marital relationships reserve judgment, not letting themselves believe that they have found the right partner until they feel confident of that partner's positive regard. People are more likely to idealize their partner's traits when they believe their partner sees them more positively on interpersonally valued traits (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). They are also more likely to idealize their partner the more loved

they feel (Murray et al., 2001). In contrast, dating and marital intimates are more likely to find fault in their partner's traits when they are more uncertain about their partner's regard. Such dependence regulation is also evident over time, pointing to the causal priority of perceived regard in fostering satisfaction and connectedness. Dating intimates who initially feel more positively regarded report greater certainty in their commitment to their partner later on. They also come to see their partner's traits more generously (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000).

A Reaction to a Real Threat?

Keeping a safe distance or even dissolving a relationship is an adaptive response for people who accurately perceive that their partner is not committed to them. It is simply too risky a gamble to forgo the potential to find a more caring partner. When people's sense of their partner's regard is calibrated, dependence regulation may function as a "stop" routine that preempts fruitless relationship pursuits (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Such calibration is not always evident. Consequently, dependence regulation efforts may be misplaced. The effects reported by Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (2000) and Murray et al. (2001) remained evident when people's perceptions of their partner's regard were controlled. Such findings suggest that dependence regulation does not simply reflect one partner's tendency to mirror the sentiments of the other—a kind of reciprocity effect. Instead, unwarranted insecurities about the partner's regard can motivate people to put the goal of self-protection ahead of the goal of relationship promotion.[10]

A Normative Rule System?

The literature reviewed suggests that people generally allow only as much practical and symbolic dependence on a partner as feels safe given their level of confidence in that partner's regard. Is a dependence regulation rule a necessary part of a risk regulation system? Perhaps people who generally anticipate acceptance, such as people who are high in self-esteem or secure in attachment style, can risk dependence without needing this form of reassurance. If that is the case, the association between perceived regard and relationship promotion should be greatly reduced. However, regardless of self-esteem or attachment style, people perceive greater value in their partner's traits the more loved and positively regarded they feel (Murray, 2005).

Individual Differences in Contingency Rule Sensitivity

How does this risk regulation system adapt itself to circumstance? Figure 2 illustrates the proposition that feeling more or less

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[9] Historically, the causal dynamics thought to underlie reciprocity of liking have been a source of considerable confusion. Scholars often describe the dynamic as Sally's liking of Harry causing Sally to perceive Harry's liking of her—the exact opposite causal process of the social exchange and dependence regulation perspectives.

[10] In underscoring the costs of underestimating a partner's regard, we should also mention that there are likely to be costs of overestimating a partner's regard as well. For instance, a high self-esteem Harry is not likely to be served well over the longer term by being unaware of the most obvious signs of Sally's disaffection. We focus on unwarranted insecurities because these types of misperceptions are more common (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray et al., 2001).

positively regarded by a partner interacts with features of specific events to structure the nature of the "if–then" contingency rules people adopt. The risk regulation model assumes that feeling less positively regarded by a partner generally primes self-protection goals. Questioning a partner's regard activates "if–then" contingencies that link situations of dependence to the perception of rejection, hurt feelings and diminished self-esteem, and behavioral and psychological tactics meant to diminish dependence. In contrast, feeling more positively regarded generally primes relationship-promotion goals. Confidence in a partner's regard activates "if–then" contingencies that link situations of dependence to the perception of acceptance and efforts to increase dependence.

In examining the evidence for individual differences in the operation of the risk regulation system, we focus on research that examines how expectations of acceptance shape people's appraisals and responses in specific situations of dependence. We review literature that includes both direct and dispositional measures of acceptance expectations because the model stipulates that specific expectations of acceptance reflect general self-views (Path E in Figure 1) and current relationship contingencies (Paths D and F in Figure 1). We review experimental, observational, and daily diary studies that examine how dispositional proxies for perceived regard affect how people think, feel, and behave in situations involving acute self-doubts (e.g., Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998), induced needs for support (Collins & Feeney, 2004), acute concerns about the partner's responsiveness (e.g., Collins, 1996; Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002; Simpson, Ickes, & Grich, 1999), and conflict (e.g., Ayduk, Downey, Testa, Yen, & Shoda, 1999; Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). The dispositional proxies we examine include global self-esteem (e.g., Murray, Rose, et al., 2002), attachment-related anxiety (e.g., Simpson et al., 1999), and rejection sensitivity (e.g., Downey & Feldman, 1996). These dispositional expectations operate similarly to partner-specific expectations of acceptance.

In a longitudinal daily diary study of married couples, Murray, Bellavia, et al. (2003; Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003) used a direct measure of expectations of a specific partner's regard and tracked how couples negotiated a wide variety of dependent situations over 21 days. Participants rated how they believed their partner saw them on positive and negative interpersonal attributes (i.e., perceived regard), such as warmth, criticalness, and responsiveness (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). In each diary, participants indicated which specific situations of dependence had occurred that day (e.g., "had a minor disagreement," "partner criticized me") and completed state items tapping self-esteem (e.g., felt "good about myself"), how rejected or accepted they felt by their partner (e.g., "rejected or hurt by my partner," "my partner accepts me as I am"), perceptions of the partner's responsiveness (e.g., "my partner is selfish"), and closeness (e.g., "in love with my partner"). The researchers then obtained reports of marital satisfaction 1 year after the daily diary period.

Individual Differences in Appraisal Sensitivity Contingencies

Although the prospect of dependence generally activates the goal of gauging a partner's regard (Path A in Figure 1), the sensitivity of this appraisal rule shifts according to the circumstances afforded by generally feeling more or less valued by a partner in situations that are more or less risky (Path I in Figure 2). Situations of dependence should readily activate concerns about rejection for people who generally feel less positively regarded by their partner (i.e., "if dependent situation, then question acceptance"). For people who generally feel more positively regarded, the goal of preserving a sense of assurance should activate relationship-promotive contingencies that link situations of dependence to bolstered perceptions of acceptance (i.e., "if dependent situation, then bolster acceptance"). Such "if–then" contingencies might involve the automatic activation of excuses or a selective search through memory for those occasions when the partner proved to be particularly responsive (Kunda, 1990). In examining these hypotheses, we explore two situations of dependence—self-based situations, in which one person needs support, and relationship-based situations, in which a partner initiates a conflict or behaves negatively.

Appraisal Sensitivity and Self-Based Situations of Dependence

Imagine that Sally gets criticized at work for failing to complete a project. Such situations activate the attachment system and the need to seek another's literal or symbolic validation (Collins & Feeney, 2000). In fact, priming failure-related thoughts activates thoughts of seeking proximity to others (Mikulincer, Birnbaum, Woddis, & Nachmias, 2000) and increases the accessibility of a romantic partner's name (Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002).

However, to the extent that Sally feels unsure of Harry's regard, she may be reluctant to disclose a personal failing for fear he might be disparaging of her. Instead, such a situation may activate "if–then" contingencies that link her failures to Harry's likely rejection. Consistent with this logic, people who are low in self-esteem—that is, people who generally doubt the acceptance of others—see interpersonal acceptance as more conditional in nature. In a lexical decision task, low self-esteem people were quicker to identify rejection-related words when they were primed with failure than when they were primed with success, and they were quicker to identify acceptance-related words when they were primed with success than with failure (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Such implicit contingencies were not evident for people who were high in self-esteem. Consequently, to the extent that Sally felt more confident of Harry's regard, she might readily compensate for her work-related angst by reminding herself how much Harry values her, using him as a resource for self-affirmation.

We find evidence of these differential appraisal contingencies in the daily diary study and experimental research. In the diary study, on days after participants felt badly about themselves, those who generally believed their partner regarded them more positively actually felt more loved and accepted by their partner (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). Unfortunately, intimates who generally felt less valued did not find this symbolic source of support or comfort in their partner.

Similarly, people who are high in self-esteem and, thus, dispositionally likely to feel more valued by their partner react to threats to self-esteem by becoming even more convinced of their dating partner's acceptance and love (Murray et al., 1998). For instance, high self-esteem participants reacted to failure on a purported test

of intelligence by exaggerating their partner's love (relative to high self-esteem controls). In contrast, dating intimates who were low in self-esteem reacted to experimentally induced doubts about their intelligence or considerateness by expressing greater concerns about their partner's likely rejection (Murray et al., 1998).

Appraisal Sensitivity and Partner-Based Situations of Dependence

Now imagine that Sally comes home to find Harry in an irritable mood, grumbling about the lack of food in the fridge and the fact that Sally had promised to replenish the fridge's contents by day's end. To the extent that Sally trusts Harry's continuing positive regard, such situations might activate appraisal contingencies that link Harry's irritation to a ready excuse. In fact, she might even find some way to see such foibles as signs of Harry's acceptance and love, a motivated reconstrual of the evidence (e.g., "If Harry grumbles, he's just showing he can be himself around me"). If Sally generally feels less valued by Harry, however, she may have difficulty attributing such negative events to some specific feature of the situation, such as Harry's fatigue. Instead, Sally may attribute such grumbling to an interpersonal disposition—his broader displeasure with her (e.g., "If Harry grumbles, he's upset with me").

We find evidence for these differential appraisal processes in both the daily diary study and prior experimental research. In the daily diary study, married intimates who generally felt less positively regarded by their spouse read decidedly more rejection-related meanings into negative situations than did intimates who generally felt more positively regarded (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). For instance, people who generally felt less valued by their partner felt more rejected on days after their partner had simply been in a worse than average mood, a mood that had nothing to do with them or the relationship. Such sensitivity to rejection was not at all characteristic of people who generally felt more positively regarded. Instead, they actually recruited more feelings of being loved and accepted by their partner on days after they reported more than their usual amount of conflict or negative partner behavior (and thus had greater actual reason to distrust their partner's availability and responsiveness).[11]

Dating intimates who are low in self-esteem overinterpret their dating partner's hypothetical negative moods, seeing them as symptomatic of their partner's ill feelings toward them (Bellavia & Murray, 2003). Low but not high self-esteem participants react to experimentally induced signs of a partner's irritation by anticipating rejection (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). Similarly, dating intimates who are high on attachment-related anxiety about acceptance (and are likely to question their specific partner's acceptance) interpret a partner's hypothetical (Collins, 1996) and actual misdeeds in suspicious ways that are likely to exacerbate hurt feelings (Mikulincer, 1998; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). People who are high on attachment-related anxiety even interpret a partner's ambiguous attempts to be supportive as intentionally hurtful (Collins & Feeney, 2004). They also interpret daily conflicts as a sign of their partner's waning commitment (L. Campbell et al., 2005). When gauging their dating partner's thoughts about attractive opposite sex others, intimates who are high on attachment-related anxiety are also more empathically accurate, discerning threatening thoughts that are misunderstood

by secure intimates (Simpson et al., 1999). People who anticipate interpersonal rejection attribute negative intent to a new partner's hypothetical behaviors (Downey & Feldman, 1996). In marriage, people who are less trusting of their partner's responsiveness react to reminders of past transgressions by perceiving more hurtful intent in their partner's discussion of a current problem. In contrast, people who are more trusting react to past transgressions by seeing their partner's current motivations more positively than controls (Holmes & Rempel, 1989).

Summary

The evidence reviewed suggests that feeling more or less positively regarded by one's partner moderates the sensitivity of the appraisal contingencies that are activated in specific situations. For people who generally feel less valued, situations of dependence activate self-protective "if–then" contingencies that link vulnerability to rejection anxiety. However, for people who generally feel more valued, situations of dependence activate relationship-promotive "if–then" contingencies that link such vulnerability to bolstered perceptions of acceptance.

Individual Differences in Self-Esteem Sensitivity Contingencies

The signaling system generally operates to detect discrepancies between current and desired appraisals of a partner's regard, thereby mobilizing energy for action (Path B in Figure 1). For people who generally feel less valued by their partner, detecting drops in acceptance poses a greater proportional loss to a limited resource. For them, the signal conveyed by this rule needs to be especially strong (Path J in Figure 2). Relative to people who feel more positively regarded, people who feel less valued should be hurt more readily, questioning their worth in the face of perceived rejections (i.e., "if feeling acutely rejected, then internalize").

Differential state sensitivities to rejection have emerged in both the daily diary study and experimental research. In the diary study, global perceptions of the spouse's regard determined how much daily concerns about a partner's rejection deflated state self-esteem (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). People who generally felt less positively regarded by their partner felt worse about themselves on days after they experienced a greater than usual level of anxiety about their partner's acceptance (as compared with low-anxiety days). In contrast, for people who generally felt more positively regarded, one day's anxieties about acceptance did not turn into the next day's self-doubts. In a conceptually parallel experiment, low but not high self-esteem dating intimates responded to induced fears that their partner perceived important faults in them by questioning their own self-worth (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002, Experiment 3).

The combination of greater appraisal and self-esteem sensitivity to rejection for people who generally feel less valued by their partner raises an interesting paradox. Namely, why are they so willing to perceive rejection if it is so hurtful? As we argued

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[11] Murray, Bellavia, et al. (2003) found no significant variability between people in their tendencies to draw inferences about acceptance or rejection from daily relationship-related positive events.

earlier, it is precisely the fact that rejection is more hurtful that makes lows more susceptible to perceiving rejection. In approaching their relationships, people who feel less valued may be attuned for signs of potential rejection so they might avoid even more hurtful situations in the future (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Given a minimal level of interdependence, such avoidance attempts are not likely to be wholly successful, however. Prior research on prevention motivations suggests that such ironic effects are quite likely to occur. For instance, people who are motivated to avoid negative outcomes (people who are high on behavioral inhibition) are no more successful in avoiding negative events than people who are low on such motivations, despite the fact that people who are high on avoidance motivation react more emotionally when such events occur (Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000).

The existing data suggest that feeling more or less positively regarded by one's partner moderates the sensitivity of the signaling rule. For people who feel less positively regarded by their partner, detecting rejection poses a greater proportional loss of an impoverished resource, heightening the need for a self-protective rule system that clearly signals the costs of dependence. Consequently, feeling rejected in specific situations hurts and diminishes self-esteem to a greater degree for people who already feel less valued by their partner.

Individual Differences in Dependence Regulation Contingencies

The behavioral response rule system operates to minimize the likelihood and pain of rejection by only allowing people to risk as much future dependence as feels safe given recent experience (Path C in Figure 1). For people who generally feel less positively regarded, perceiving acute rejections should activate the goal of self-protection and the desire to reduce dependence (Path K in Figure 2). For people who feel more positively regarded, perceiving acute rejections should activate the goal of promoting dependence and connectedness.

If Feeling Acutely Rejected, Then Decrease Dependence

The existing evidence suggests that people who feel less valued by their partner do indeed respond to perceived rejections by reducing dependence. In the daily diary study (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003), people who generally felt less positively regarded responded to feeling acutely rejected by their partner one day by treating their partner in more cold, critical, and negative ways the next day. For lows, feeling rejected activated the behavioral contingency "distance myself from my partner." These reactions emerged even though the partners of people who felt less valued were not actually upset with them when the people felt most rejected. Instead, people who felt less valued responded to an imagined rejection by treating their partner badly.

Conceptual replications of these dynamics are evident in experimental and field research. People who are likely to doubt their partner's acceptance by virtue of their disposition react to feeling rejected in specific situations in ways that minimize dependence. People with low self-esteem respond to induced anxieties about their partner's possible rejection by depending less on their partner as a source of self-esteem and comfort (Murray et al., 1998). They also evaluate their partner's qualities more negatively (Murray et

al., 1998; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). The need to downplay the value and importance of the partner (the source of the hurt) is sufficiently powerful that derogation effects emerge on the qualities that typically reveal people's positive illusions about their partner (Murray et al., 1996b). These devaluing processes also emerge whether these acute rejection anxieties are imagined in response to a newly discovered fault in the self (Murray et al., 1998) or arise in response to the partner's behavior (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). Such devaluing efforts appear in part to be automatic, as they also surface on implicit measures of partner regard (De Hart, Pelham, & Murray, 2004). Low self-esteem people evaluate their partner's name letters less favorably the more difficulties they currently perceive in their relationships. By diminishing their partner's value, people who feel less valued give their partner less power to hurt them in the future by making the partner a less important source of need satisfaction and a less valued informant on their general worthiness of love and connection.

Research by other scholars further illustrates the model's contention that risky situations activate distancing attempts for people who generally feel less valued by a specific partner. Women who are higher in attachment-related anxiety display greater anger toward their partner in a situation in which their partner might not have been as responsive as they hoped (Rholes, Simpson, & Orina, 1999). After discussing a serious relationship problem, more anxiously attached men and women also reported greater anger and hostility (as compared with controls, who discussed a minor problem), and they downplayed their feelings of closeness and commitment (Simpson et al., 1996). To the extent that expressions of anger are a means of trying to control the partner's behavior, such sentiment both directly and indirectly reduces dependence.

Intimates who were high on attachment-related anxiety also reported feeling less close to their partner in a situation in which they accurately inferred the (threatening) content of their partner's thoughts about attractive opposite sex others (Simpson et al., 1999). When dating men in this study were both high on attachment-related anxiety and empathically accurate, their relationships were at the greatest risk of dissolution (Simpson et al., 1999). People who are high on attachment-related anxiety also react to higher levels of daily conflict by minimizing their feelings of closeness to their partner (L. Campbell et al., 2005). As another example, women who are chronically high on rejection sensitivity respond to a potential partner's disinterest by evaluating that partner more negatively (Ayduk et al., 1999). Rejection-sensitive women are also more likely to initiate conflicts on days after they felt more rejected by their romantic partner, and simply priming rejection-related words automatically activates hostility-related thoughts for these women (Ayduk et al., 1999).

If Feeling Acutely Rejected, Then Increase Dependence

For people who generally feel more positively regarded, feeling acutely rejected activates "if–then" contingencies that link situations of dependence to relationship-promotion goals. Such dependence-increasing contingencies emerged in the diary sample and in experimental research. Intimates who generally felt more positively regarded actually drew closer to their partner on days after they felt most rejected, a relationship-promotive response (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). Similarly, dating intimates who tend to feel more positively regarded by virtue of higher global

self-esteem respond to induced concerns about their dating partner's likely annoyance with them by reporting greater feelings of closeness to that same partner (Murray, Rose, et al., 2002, Experiment 2). For highs, feeling rejected activated a behavioral contingency "draw closer." Dating intimates who are high in global self-esteem also react to experimentally induced self-doubts by reporting greater dependence on their partner's reassurance as a source of self-esteem (Murray et al., 1998). Similarly, people who are low on attachment-related anxiety come to value their partner more after discussing a serious conflict than after discussing a minor conflict (Simpson et al., 1996). Such relationship-promotive tendencies even extend to situations in which a partner is attracted to another. Intimates who are low on attachment-related anxiety feel closer to their partner the more accurate they are in discerning their partner's attraction to opposite sex others (Simpson et al., 1999).

Summary

The literature reviewed suggests that feeling more or less positively regarded by a partner moderates or controls the activation of specific dependence regulation contingencies. For people who feel less positively regarded, specific rejection experiences activate self-protective "if–then" contingencies that link the restoration of assurance to decreased dependence. For people who feel more positively regarded, specific rejections activate relationship-promotive "if–then" contingencies that link the restoration of assurance to increased dependence.[12]

Alternative Explanations for the Moderating Effects of Perceived Regard

The findings reviewed suggest that feeling less positively regarded by a specific partner sensitizes people to the prospect of rejection and the potential for hurt and loss, activating "if–then" contingency rules that favor self-protection goals. In contrast, generally feeling more positively regarded sensitizes people to the benefits of closeness, activating "if–then" contingency rules that favor relationship-promotion goals. Alternative conceptual explanations for these effects exist, however. We address three salient possibilities.

The first alternative is that people who feel less positively regarded may not be sensitized to rejection. Instead, they might possess partners who value them less and behave in ways that warrant greater concerns about rejection. However, the appraisal, signaling, and dependence regulation effects observed in the diary study remained when the authors controlled for the partner's actual regard and behavior (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003).

The second alternative centers around the influence of generalized as opposed to specific expectations of acceptance (Holmes & Cameron, 2005). The literature reviewed suggests that both dispositional insecurities, such as low self-esteem or chronic attachment anxiety, and specific insecurities about a partner's regard sensitize people to drawing rejection-related inferences, sensitize people to internalizing rejection, and motivate people to respond to feeling rejected by distancing. We interpret this convergence as evidence for the importance of partner-specific expectations, as even generalized measures capture specific expectations of acceptance. The

alternative possibility is that the apparent moderating effect of feeling valued by a specific partner might better reflect the moderating effect of more generalized representations.

Further analyses of the data reported by Murray, Bellavia, et al. (2003) revealed that chronic attachment-related anxiety did shape appraisal and dependence regulation contingencies. People who were higher on attachment-related anxiety were more likely to feel rejected on days after conflicts or days after they perceived a moody or ill-behaved spouse. They were also more likely to respond to feeling rejected one day by behaving in a more negative, rejecting way toward their partner on subsequent days. However, an independent effect of partner-specific expectations emerged beyond the effect of such generalized attachment expectations.

The third possibility is that people who feel less valued behave badly in response to feeling hurt not to self-protect but to retaliate. If retaliation is the primary motivation, we should find the most evidence of dependence regulation in situations in which the partner is actually behaving badly. Also, the punishment should in some sense fit the crime. However, people with low self-esteem respond to doubts about their own intelligence (and the anticipated rejection these doubts activate) by devaluing their partner (Murray et al., 1998). Such partner derogation effects emerge in the partner's absence (Murray et al., 1998; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002) and on measures of implicit partner regard (DeHart et al., 2004). Married intimates who feel less valued also respond to feeling rejected by treating their partner badly when nothing in their partner's behavior should have elicited such treatment (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). In making the point that these actions are not necessarily retaliative, we are not disputing the evidence that feeling rejected primes aggressive impulses (Twenge et al., 2001). Instead, rather than being an end in itself, such aggressive acts may represent an overlearned means of reducing dependence.

A related possibility is that people who feel less valued might behave negatively toward their partner in response to acute hurts not to distance themselves but as an attempt to elicit reassurance and draw closer to their partner (i.e., protest behavior). If people who feel less valued are trying to draw closer, they should show signs of behavioral ambivalence. However, married intimates who felt less valued were no more likely to respond to feeling hurt by engaging in more positive behaviors toward their partner (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003). In a variety of experiments, low self-esteem participants showed no sign of responding to rejection by evaluating their partner more positively (Murray et al., 1998; Murray, Rose, et al., 2002). The evidence just reviewed also demonstrates that people who feel less valued respond to rejection with anger and hostility.

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[12] The proposed model contends that people who feel less valued react to acute hurts by minimizing dependence to blunt the pain of future rejections. However, one could argue that people withdraw from a partner not to minimize the partner's value but to minimize the likelihood of doing something that might further undermine the partner's regard (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). As people are behaving in ways that put them at risk of eliciting a partner's annoyance, the motivation to blunt the pain of future rejections is likely to be the more pressing one, at least in this context.

Applications of the Risk Regulation Model

In this section, we outline how conceptualizing a state of assurance or "felt security" in terms of people's means of resolving conflicts between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals can help resolve three enduring issues in the close relationships area.

Procedural Markers of Relationship Resilience

The holy grail of close relationships research is determining which relationships are likely to thrive and which are likely to fail. What metrics might make such discriminations? The most common metric involves comparing the relationship outcomes of people who differ in their amount or level of a particular construct—a person-centered approach (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). For instance, people's *mean* levels of support provision might be used to predict relationship outcomes. The current analysis of the risk regulation system points to an alternative metric. A *correlation* tapping people's tendency to provide greater support in situations in which their partner expresses more or less need might better predict relationship outcomes.

The current model assumes that a relationship's ultimate fate rests in the nature of the "if–then" contingencies that people adopt to negotiate interdependent situations (Paths L through N in Figure 2). Because the authors examined couples across situations, the diary study (Murray, Bellavia, et al., 2003; Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003) afforded a means for obtaining indexes of the "if–then" contingencies implicit in each person's relationship representations. For instance, the size and direction of the within-person correlation or slope linking one day's self-doubts to changes in the next day's expectations of partner acceptance provide one index of how a person's online appraisal system is calibrated (i.e., a *self-event-driven* appraisal rule, Path L). In this case, more positive slopes (predicting acceptance from self-esteem) reflect people's implicit assumption that the partner is more accepting when their personal qualities warrant it.

The size and direction of the within-person correlation or slope linking one day's level of rejection anxiety to changes in self-esteem the next day tap a person's level of self-esteem sensitivity to rejection (Path M). In this case, more negative slopes (linking rejection anxiety to self-esteem) reflect the operation of a more sensitive signaling system. In terms of the contingency rules that regulate dependence (Path N), the nature of the slope linking one day's rejection anxiety to the next day's level of negative behavior toward the partner taps one index of each person's tendency to respond to feeling rejected by minimizing dependence (i.e., a self-protective dependence regulation rule). In contrast, the nature of the slope linking one day's rejection anxiety to the next day's willingness to provide support or the next day's feelings of closeness to the partner taps possible indexes of each person's tendency to respond to feeling rejected by increasing dependence (i.e., a relationship-promotive dependence regulation rule).

A 1-year follow-up on the married sample that participated in the daily diary study reported by Murray, Griffin, et al. (2003) revealed promising support for the idea that the fate of relationships may rest in part in how people regulate the tension between self-protection and relationship-promotion motives on a day-to-day basis (Paths L through N in Figure 2). Relationship difficulties

were more likely to arise when people's online systems for appraising rejection threats were calibrated in a more self-protective fashion. When women linked their own personal self-doubts to their husband's lessened acceptance, their husband reported relatively greater declines in satisfaction over time (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). When women both felt less valued by their husband and linked personal successes at work to their husband's acceptance and failures to rejection, their husband also became more distressed over time (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2006). Conversely, when women compensated for self-doubts by embellishing their partner's acceptance, their husband reported relatively greater satisfaction (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003). Relationship difficulties were also more likely to arise over time when people's signaling systems were more sensitive to rejection. When people reacted to anxieties about rejection by reporting diminished self-esteem the next day, their partner reported significantly greater declines in satisfaction. Finally, when women's behavioral response to feeling rejected was to reduce dependence, their husband's satisfaction declined. The more women reacted to felt rejection by behaving negatively on subsequent days, the greater was the decline in their husband's satisfaction (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003).

The longitudinal costs of self-protective contingency rules emerged even in analyses in which Murray, Griffin, et al. (2003) controlled for the mean levels of the self-related affect or behavior in question, which suggests that the fate of people's relationships really may rest in the mental and behavioral "if–then" associations they form to deal with specific situations of dependence and vulnerability. The effects of these subtle "if–then" contingencies in shaping the future of these marriages are all the more impressive given the difficulty of predicting changes in satisfaction with considerably more obvious indicators (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). In summary, when intimates put self-protection ahead of relationship promotion, it seems to set the stage for interactions that ultimately undermine relationship well-being.

Why Seeking Acceptance Can Sometimes Make Finding It Less Likely

It is one of the enduring ironies of life that people who want something more are often less likely to find it. This same irony riddles romantic life: People who are low in self-esteem or insecure in attachment style are less likely to find lasting happiness in relationships even though they need this resource the most (Collins & Read, 1990; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). The salient explanation for such effects is that people troubled by dispositional insecurities pick worse partners who are less likely to be valuing of them. This is not the case. The association between spouses' self-esteem levels is near zero (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Moreover, cross-sectional data reveal that people express just as much love for low self-esteem partners as they do for high self-esteem partners (Murray et al., 2001). People also see low self-esteem partners more positively than they see themselves (Murray et al., 1996a). Why do people troubled by self-doubt end up in relationships that both partners find less satisfying?

The nature of interdependence is such that hurts at the hands of a partner are inevitable. Because people troubled by dispositional insecurities are likely to doubt their partner's regard (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Tucker &

Anders, 1999), they are not likely to respond to such interdependence dilemmas in ways that promote the relationship. Instead, they are likely to see the slightest offense as rejection and be motivated to self-protect.

Therefore, the desire to reduce dependence and minimize the pain of rejection in the short term could have the unintended consequence of making partner rejection more likely (Paths L through N in Figure 2). For instance, on days after rejection-sensitive women felt rejected by their dating partner, their partner also reported greater dissatisfaction, even though their partner had not been upset initially (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998). In the Murray, Bellavia, et al. (2003) study, people with a partner who felt less valued came to see their partner as being more selfish and unappreciative on days after their partner had felt most rejected, even though they had not been upset with their partner in the first place. In such ways, self-protective attempts to blunt the likelihood and pain of rejection eventually alienate one's partner. In fact, intimates in dating relationships come to regard low self-esteem partners less favorably over time and ultimately report less satisfaction themselves (Murray et al., 1996b).

By putting self-protection at a greater premium than relationship promotion, people who feel less positively regarded may create long-term interpersonal realities that defeat their hopes and confirm their fears. Repeated experiences with a partner who reads too much into relatively mundane problems and lashes out in return may then set the stage for cycles of negative affect and behavior that are the hallmark of marital distress (Gottman, 1994).

Unfortunately, the potential for such patterns to develop is not likely to be part of the consciousness of a person caught in the immediate experience of trying to blunt the short-term pain of a perceived rejection. People respond to experimentally induced fears of lifelong rejection and social isolation by behaving in self-defeating ways, putting short-term pleasures, such as making risky gambles or unhealthy food choices, ahead of the long-term costs of such endeavors (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002). Induced rejection fears also undermine people's scores on intelligence tests (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002), which suggests that coping with rejection impairs the type of executive functioning necessary for effective self-regulation. For people who chronically doubt their partner's regard, gauging and then responding to perceived rejections may be sufficiently preoccupying that they exhaust the self-regulatory resources needed to anticipate the costs of self-protection (Finkel & Campbell, 2001).

Understanding Relationship Transitions

Although the nature of interdependence changes dramatically as couples go from casual dating, to commitment, to shared childcare responsibilities, close relationships scholars have paid little attention to how such structural changes could also change the basis for relationship well-being and resilience. In particular, specific transition points in a relationship's development are likely to heighten people's need for a protective sense of confidence in a partner's regard. Imagine the threat posed by the prospect of a relationship becoming long distance or the stakes involved in deciding whether to get engaged. These transition points necessitate at least some deliberation about the costs and benefits of increasing one's commitment, deliberations that are likely to highlight the possibility of rejection and relationship loss. Consequently, people in this state

of mind might take a mental step back and try to evaluate their relationship in a more balanced manner. However, once people have put thoughts of rejection out of mind and made the decision to deepen dependency, their psychological energies should be geared toward finding ways to see their relationship in the best possible light (e.g., Taylor & Gollwitzer, 1995).

Transition Points

Supporting this logic is the fact that people make more accurate forecasts about the future fate of their relationships when they are deliberating about an important relationship decision than when they are thinking about how to implement an already made decision (Gagne & Lydon, 2001a). These effects emerge because people in a deliberative mind-set consider both the positive and the negative features of the partner and relationship in making their predictions, whereas people in an implemental mind-set focus only on the positive. Put in terms of risk regulation processes, people in a deliberative mind-set may be more evenhanded precisely because such deliberations sensitize them to the possibility of rejection and the need for caution. If this is the case, thinking in a deliberative way should be less threatening and engender less need for caution for people who generally trust in their partner's availability and responsiveness. Consistent with this analysis, people who are high in commitment to their partner respond to the threat implicit in deliberating about the relationship by evaluating their partner more positively (Gagne & Lydon, 2001b). Such defensive reactions do not emerge for people who are less committed.

Recalibrating the Risk Regulation System

Events and transitions of sufficient magnitude should also have the potential to recalibrate the risk regulation system, shifting people's means of maintaining a sense of invulnerability to harm. Recalibration in people's "if–then" rules then may change more general levels of confidence in the partner's regard by altering levels of dependence in ways that either increase or decrease a partner's capacity to provide actual evidence of caring.

In the first 2 years following marriage, newlyweds report less chronic anxiety about abandonment and greater comfort depending on others (Davila, Karney, & Bradbury, 1999). Given the assurance afforded by a publicly recognized commitment, even people who have been uncertain of their partner's regard may entertain more optimistic expectations of acceptance. These heightened feelings of confidence might temporarily desensitize them to the risks of dependence, altering the "if–then" contingencies underlying the appraisal system. In the light of Sally's new commitment, her criticisms about Harry's weight may not be troubling to him. Desensitized to Sally's criticism in this domain, Harry might become more willing to brush off Sally's perceived transgressions in other domains. If forgiving Sally's transgression has positive consequences for Harry, such positive experiences might, in turn, lessen Harry's need for a sensitive signaling system. He might then be willing to risk entering into new situations of dependence. His once chronic doubts about Sally's regard might then begin to abate because he has given Sally more opportunities to demonstrate caring. In such ways, the graded activation of relationship-promotive "if–then" contingencies could bolster confidence in a partner's regard.

In contrast, marital roles become increasingly traditional over the transition to parenthood, and women are likely to shoulder more than their fair share of the burden for childcare and household tasks (Grote & Clark, 2001; Hackel & Ruble, 1992). Given the stress of this transition, most women may question their husband's capacity to meet their needs. Even if Sally generally had felt confident of Harry's regard in the past, this transition might trigger the operation of a self-protective appraisal system (Holmes, 1981). In the domains of housework and childcare, Sally might begin to appraise events in ways that draw her attention to inequities. Although she once overlooked Harry's failure to tend to the dishes, such episodes might now activate concerns about his responsiveness (e.g., "If my partner doesn't help me, he doesn't care"). Such sensitivity to perceiving rejection in this domain might then spill into others. Accumulated instances of perceived nonresponsiveness might then heighten Sally's need to be wary of situations in which she might be hurt, leaving her self-esteem more dependent on Harry's actions. Sally's greater self-esteem sensitivity might then motivate her to avoid situations in which Harry might be insensitive to her plight, effectively limiting his opportunities to demonstrate his caring. The erosion of Harry and Sally's marriage may be evident in a sequence whereby appraisal rules first become sensitized to rejection, signaling rules then become amplified, and dependence regulation rules finally become self-protective. In such ways, the graded activation of self-protective "if–then" rules could erode Sally's confidence in Harry's caring for her.

A Theoretical Integration

Apart from its utility as a heuristic tool for addressing applied problems, the risk regulation model offers a means of integrating the assumptions of the sociometer model (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), the relational schemas approach (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Baldwin, 1992), attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), and interdependence theory (Holmes, 2002). By focusing on the interdependence dilemmas implicit in adult romantic relationships, the proposed model adds further richness to these theoretical perspectives.

The Sociometer Model

The conceptualization of perceived regard as an arbiter that estimates and summarizes rejection risk coincides with many aspects of the sociometer model of self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Leary et al., 1995). Both perspectives assume that people are motivated to feel positively regarded and valued by others. Both perspectives also assume that social relationships are most likely to be satisfying and stable when people respond to signs of rejection by behaving in ways that put connectedness at a premium.

However, the present conceptualization of the interrelation between self-esteem and connectedness motivations differs from the sociometer model. These motivations are largely isomorphic in the sociometer model. When the threat of rejection is salient, establishing connection represents the primary means of having one's needs for approval met, thereby restoring a sense of esteem in one's relational value.

In the unique context of an adult close relationship, these motivations are more separable and, consequently, sometimes in conflict. As most people possess one romantic partner at a time, this person has special power in satisfying (or thwarting) people's capacity to meet important needs and goals. Such outcome control makes a romantic partner a uniquely powerful informant on one's worthiness of interpersonal connection. Consequently, people are likely concerned about more than just minimizing the actual potential for rejection (as in the sociometer model). Instead, preemptively minimizing the pain of rejection if it were to occur is also an important goal. For these interrelated reasons, the present model assumes that people actively regulate their sense of connection to this specific other—letting a partner become a valued and important source of need satisfaction when the potential for rejection seems low. In contrast, minimizing the partner's value may be the best means of discounting the meaning of unresponsive behaviors when people are less sure of another's acceptance. In so doing, people can protect a symbolic sense of connection to others without the cooperation of specific others (in the short term).

The integration of the sociometer and risk regulation models may rest in the possibility that people may possess multiple sociometers, ones that vary in their generality and, thus, in their likelihood of being activated in specific contexts (see Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001). At the highest level of generality, global self-esteem might operate as a default. This sociometer might forecast the likelihood of acceptance and regulate affect and behavior in situations with strangers or casual friends (Leary et al., 1995; Nezlek et al., 1997). Perceptions of a partner's regard might operate as a lower level sociometer. This gauge might forecast the likelihood of acceptance and regulate behavior with one specific relationship. This lower level sociometer also might operate in ways that guard against losses to the operating level of the general sociometer. In this light, people who generally feel less valued by their partner may distance themselves from a rejecting partner to protect a more general sense of their worthiness of interpersonal connection.

Relational Schemas and Relational Selves

The current model shares several points of emphasis with recent social–cognitive analyses of relational schemas (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Baldwin, 1992). Baldwin (1992) argued that people develop relational schemas through past experiences with others that help them navigate their social worlds. These schemas include declarative beliefs about the characteristics of the self in specific contexts, beliefs about the characteristics of others in these same contexts, and "if–then" interpersonal scripts that specify the relation between the self and others (e.g., "If I depend on my spouse for support, he or she will be comforting"). Similarly, Andersen and Chen (2002) argued that accessible ties exist in memory between aspects of people's self-conceptions and representations of specific significant others. Consequently, signs of a significant other's qualities in a new acquaintance can activate the significant other representation through a process of transference. This activation can then shift people's self-concepts to match those self-aspects experienced in the presence of the significant other (e.g., Hinkley & Andersen, 1996).

Both of these theoretical perspectives share points of emphasis with the model we have presented. These perspectives assume that

people are motivated to establish secure ties to others and that people's sense of themselves is shaped by their expectations about the orientation of specific significant others toward them. These perspectives also assume that the declarative and procedural aspects of people's working models shape social inference and behavior.

The current model advances thinking about relational schemas because it identifies three general "if–then" contingency rules and describes how they develop across situations of dependence. The model also differs in its conceptualization of self-schemas and their relation to schemas of specific others. A relational schemas approach assumes that the content of people's working self-concepts shifts to accommodate whatever audience is most salient. For instance, Harry may think of himself as a leader in his dealings with his office subordinates but as egalitarian in his equal-status interactions with his wife Sally because the model of other that is activated in each context primes a different aspect of his self-concept. The current model assigns greater causal priority to the reflected aspects of people's self-schemas, such as Harry's perception of how much Sally values his skills. In this model, people's reflected image of themselves shapes the goals they adopt in specific situations because such self-schemas afford more or less optimistic inferences about another's likely responsiveness to the self. The present model further suggests that models of self then dynamically shape people's models of others.

Attachment Theory

The current model resonates with many aspects of attachment theory (see Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for reviews). Both perspectives assume that assessments of an attachment figure's availability and responsiveness determine the strategies people adopt to restore a psychological sense of safety in threatening situations. Both perspectives also assume that understanding people's sensitivity to rejection-related cues and strategic responses to feeling rejected is critical in determining the relationship's current welfare and future stability. Both perspectives also assume that people's capacity to forge satisfying adult relationships rests in part on the expectations that develop in formative relationships.

The current conceptualization of the nature of the relation between working models of self and other presents a different twist on attachment theory. Attachment theorists generally argue that the systems that detect rejection threats operate largely independently of the systems that respond to such threats (Bartholomew, 1990; Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994; but see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003, for a recent exception). Fraley and Shaver (2000) argued that attachment-related anxiety governs the appraisal or threat detection system, whereas attachment-related avoidance governs the system regulating behavioral responses to threat. As these systems are thought to be independent in principle, people can express strong fears of rejection and strong desires for closeness (i.e., preoccupied) or few anxieties about rejection and strong desires for distance (i.e., dismissing).

The proposed model contends that the "if–then" rules that sensitize people to perceiving and internalizing a partner's rejection must be connected to the "if–then" rules that dull the impact of such threats if people are to sustain feelings of assurance. In other words, people are not likely to see qualities in a specific other

that would elicit proximity seeking unless they can first find reason to trust in that specific other's regard. Thus, the current model suggests that models of specific others are likely to be contingent on expectations of acceptance. It also suggests that generalized expectations about one's worthiness of love and the trustworthiness of others—aspects of working models that have often been conceptualized as independent—might have common effects mediated through the specific beliefs they foster about a partner's regard. Thus, both anxiety and avoidance might regulate people's willingness to risk dependence.[13]

Consistent with the risk regulation model, generalized attachment-related anxiety and avoidance are equally detrimental to feeling positively regarded by one's partner (Holmes & Cameron, 2005). When anxiety and avoidance are viewed as statements about the partner's anticipated responsiveness, the behaviors associated with preoccupied and dismissing styles also take on a different meaning. Both hyperactivating behaviors, such as expressing hostility or controlling the partner, and deactivating behaviors, such as immersing oneself in work, may resolve the tension between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals. Both of these classes of behavior reduce one's dependence on the partner's good will. For instance, by demanding more of Harry's attention, Sally may be trying to reduce the likelihood that he will act in ways that are not sufficiently attentive to her needs (Holmes & Rempel, 1989).

To take this logic one step further, we note that the ultimate effect of people's general expectations about themselves and others may be modified by people's partner-specific beliefs (see Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004). If that is the case, people who are troubled by dispositional vulnerabilities may respond adaptively to threat if they believe their partner sees qualities in them that merit attention, nurturance, and care. Consistent with this logic, secure base schemas—expectations of responsive and loving care—can be activated even for people who are insecure in attachment style (e.g., Mikulincer et al, 2000; Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002). Similarly, women who are high in attachment anxiety who nonetheless believe that their partner will be responsive during the transition to parenthood remain satisfied in their marriage during this stressful time. The opposite is true when anxious–ambivalent women do not feel valued by their partner (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001). People who are high in attachment anxiety who nonetheless feel confident in a partner's acceptance also report better quality interactions in daily life than people who possess pessimistic general and specific expectations (Pierce & Lydon, 1998). Further research along these lines has the potential to enrich both attachment and risk regulation perspectives.

Interdependence Theory

The current model's emphasis on the diagnostic nature of situations that create a tension between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals resonates with analyses that depict behavior as a function of the person and the situation

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[13] For this reason, we prefer the more generic term *model of other* to *avoidance.* Avoidant behaviors or psychological distancing may stem from either anxiety about rejection or doubts about others.

(Holmes, 2002; Kelley & Holmes, 2003; Kelley et al., 2003). Mischel and Shoda (1995) argued that the essence of people's dispositions or personality rests in the contingencies that underlie the ways that they think, feel, and behave in similar situations. Kelley and Holmes (2003) extended such an analysis to adult close relationships. They argued that specific relationship situations differ in the substantive problems they present and in the interpersonal dispositions that are relevant to solving such problems. Thus, situations afford the activation of certain interpersonal dispositions. For instance, in a situation in which Harry and Sally need to coordinate divergent movie preferences, Harry's trust in Sally may afford a cooperative choice on Harry's part, one that presumes Sally will also act to maximize their joint interests. In interdependence theory terms, the nature of people's beliefs about their partner's goals in such situations shapes the goals people select (Holmes, 2002).

The current model shares assumptions that are fundamental to both the Mischel and Shoda (1995) and the Kelley et al. (2003) analyses. These perspectives both assume that social perception is influenced both by features of the situation and by people's expectations and goals. Both models also emphasize people's expectations about their partner's goals (Holmes, 2002). However, classic perspectives on interdependence assume that people develop only situation-specific beliefs about their partner's goals. The proposed model assumes that people rely on general expectations about their partner's regard to predict their partner's goals in specific situations. These perspectives also assume that expectations or goals turn one kind of situation into another. The current model focuses specifically on how people transform a situation that has the possible risk of rejection into a situation that activates the goal of being connected.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Of all the forms of caution, caution in love is perhaps the most fatal to true happiness.—Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*

Perhaps one of the greatest ironies of life is that the relationships that have the most potential to satisfy adult needs for interpersonal connection are the very relationships that activate the most anxiety about rejection (Baumeister et al., 1993). Given the personal stakes associated with narrowing social connections to focus on one partner, some level of caution is required. However, to be happy over the longer term, people need to set rejection concerns aside and risk substantial dependence (Murray, 1999). The research reviewed suggests that people are most likely to experience a relationship as satisfying and fulfilling when they put seeking connectedness ahead of minimizing the likelihood and pain of rejection.

Aspects of this risk regulation system still require development and research. The most important avenue for future research involves stipulating the content of the "if–then" rules underlying the appraisal, signaling, and behavioral regulation systems. First, the content of appraisal contingencies and how such contingencies change over time require greater specification. For instance, early in the relationship, signs of Harry's irritation might activate the general goal of relationship promotion for a secure Sally, motivating her to find some way of excusing this behavior. However, with repeated experience, signs of Harry's irritation might automatically activate specific beliefs about his patient nature.

Second, further specificity is also needed to delineate the specific "if–then" contingency rules that govern strategic attempts to increase or decrease dependence. Most research has focused on behaviors and thoughts that directly or indirectly diminish the value of the partner's contributions to the relationship. However, people could also limit dependence by reducing their own inputs—by becoming less prosocial and willing to give of themselves to meet their partner's needs. Examinations of the regulation of the "if–then" contingencies surrounding caregiving (Feeney & Collins, 2001) and communal norm adherence (Grote & Clark, 2001) present two critical avenues for study. Examining how "if–then" contingencies change in their specificity and coherence over time also presents an important task for future research. With repeated experience, the generic goals of avoiding rejection or increasing connection may be supplanted by a repertoire of specific behaviors that best fulfill such goals. In her first experiences with conflicts, an insecure Sally might "try out" different means of regulating a sense of assurance or safety. As some strategies prove more effective than others, the types of behaviors that are linked to such situations may become increasingly regimented.

Greater attention to issues of reciprocal causation and longitudinal change will further enhance the utility of this conceptual model. One avenue involves stipulating how the "if–then" contingency rules a person adopts in a specific relationship affect his or her general dispositions toward relationships. For instance, people who react to feeling rejected by self-protecting may become more generally avoidant of intimacy and closeness. A second avenue involves demonstrating the interconnected operation of the risk regulation system, including issues of mediation. The link between the signaling and dependence regulation systems presents a ripe avenue for research in this respect. In the short term, the acute self-esteem sting of rejection may motivate dependence regulation. Over time, dependence regulation responses may preempt such consciously felt hurts from arising if specific situations trigger active efforts at avoidance.

A third avenue involves further specifying the dyadic nature of risk regulation processes. The huge majority of the existing research examines how people's "individual" perceptions of their relationships affect their contingency rules. However, the contingency rule one partner adopts must shape and influence the rules adopted by the other partner. The evidence for self-fulfilling effects points to this possibility, but, with few exceptions, most relationship scholars have not examined how each partner's qualities combine to create a unique relationship personality (see Swann, Rentfrow, & Gosling, 2003, for an exception). It is critical to specify exactly how such couple effects emerge and shape how risk regulation systems operate.

Further research might also profitably examine whether the proposed model provides a template for understanding the dynamics inherent in nonromantic relationships. The dynamics we have described should be most evident in relationships in which people can choose how much dependence to risk and in which the value of a particular other's regard is not easily substituted. It is in these situations that people should need the assurance provided by specific expectations of caring. Consequently, dependence regulation dynamics might be more pronounced in relationships between adult parents and children or between best friends (DeHart, Murray, Pelham, & Rose, 2003) than in relationships between casual friends or coworkers.

Although the tension between self-protection and relationship-promotion goals is a fundamental undercurrent in interpersonal life, this conflict has received little attention. Understanding the regulating role played by confidence in a partner's regard is likely to have the practical benefit of increasing insight into both the relational self and relationship resilience and the conceptual benefit of integrating diverse theoretical perspectives under one umbrella.

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