

# Making the good even better: A review and theoretical model of interpersonal capitalization

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## Abstract

When good things happen, individuals will often retell this good news to others, a process termed *capitalization*. In so doing, individuals sharing their good news (i.e., *capitalizers*) boost their mood and relationships with the person(s) to whom they retell their news (i.e., *responders*). Most extant research has focused on the benefits for the capitalizers. Capitalization, however, is a social process that affects both capitalizers *and* responders, and research has only begun to explore the benefits of capitalization for responders. In this article, we provide a fresh perspective on the state of this literature by proposing the interpersonal model of capitalization (InterCAP). We illustrate how InterCAP (a) integrates and organizes existing research and theory, (b) formally emphasizes the interpersonal and iterative nature of the capitalization process, and (c) identifies gaps in current knowledge. We conclude by offering recommendations for integrating InterCAP with other theoretical models and suggestions for future research.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

*Happiness adds and multiplies, as we divide it with others.—Arthur Nielsen*

When good things happen, people sometimes remark that they feel “happy as a clam.” To us, this seems an inapt metaphor in that clams are shut tight, cut off from other members of their species. Among humans, in contrast, happy events usually motivate social retelling of those events. Individuals tell others about a promotion, share endearing pictures of their children and pets on social media, and describe the great cup of coffee they had at a new coffee shop to their friends. People want to communicate their good fortune and positive experiences to others, a process called *capitalization*, first identified by Langston (1994) and then revisited and extended by Gable, Reis, Impett, and Asher (2004). Most extant theorizing and research on capitalization has emphasized its personal and relational

benefits for the individuals retelling their good news (i.e., *capitalizers*; see Gable & Reis, 2010, for a review). However, more broadly construed, capitalization is a dynamic, interpersonal process. That is, capitalization is contagious, benefiting individuals being told the good news (i.e., *responders*) as well as capitalizers, and can promote future capitalization attempts, responses, and long-term relationship well-being.

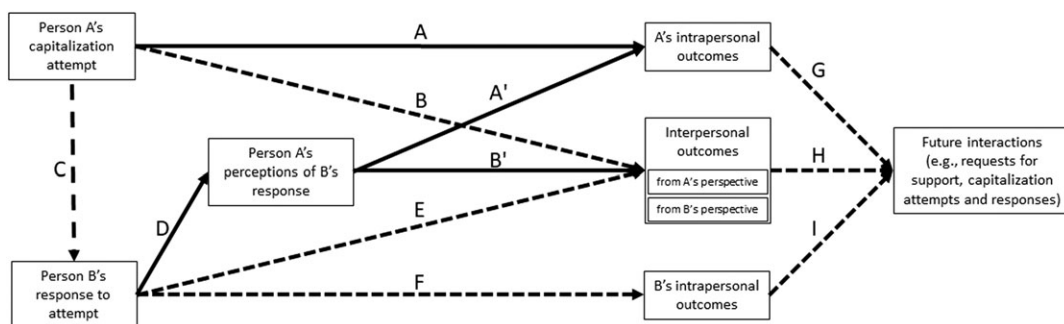
In the current review, we introduce the *Interpersonal Model of Capitalization* (InterCAP; see Figure 1). This model has a threefold purpose: it (a) helps integrate prior theoretical accounts of capitalization (i.e., Gable & Reis, 2010) with more recent research, (b) formally adds interpersonal and iterative components to the capitalization process, and (c) reveals gaps in current knowledge that we hope inspires and guides future research. In what follows, we provide a theoretical overview of the capitalization process, review early seminal findings, and offer a theoretical justification for the hypothesized interpersonal and iterative components of capitalization. We then systematically review articles on capitalization that appeared after the Gable and Reis (2010) review and integrate them within InterCAP. Specifically, we explore (a) the underlying mechanisms and moderators of capitalizers' *intrapersonal* outcomes, (b) responders' *intrapersonal* outcomes, (c) capitalizers' and responders' *interpersonal* outcomes, (d) interventions, and (e) directions for future research.

## 2 | BRIEF THEORETICAL OVERVIEW AND REVIEW OF EARLY FINDINGS

### 2.1 | What is capitalization?

*Capitalization* is an interpersonal process wherein capitalizers retell their personal good news to responders. This process is termed "capitalizing" because through this interaction, capitalizers may reap additional benefits, over and above the original value of the positive event (Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994).<sup>1</sup> Several fundamental assumptions and restrictions underlie this definition. First, responders' replies to the good news and, more importantly, capitalizers' perceptions of their responses are critical in determining intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes (Figure 1: mediation of paths A and B via CDA' and CDB', respectively; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006; Gable et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2012).<sup>2</sup> Second, capitalization is the *retelling*, not the simultaneous experiencing of good news, because in the latter case, the distinction between capitalizer and responder is muddled or nonexistent. Third, in capitalization research, mundane everyday events may be just as influential as life-altering events, because it is the interpersonal nature of capitalization—the act of sharing and the response of the partner—that is key to reaping intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes.

Fourth, and finally, capitalization shares conceptual overlap with social support but remains theoretically and empirically distinct (cf. Shorey & Lakey, 2011). Traditional definitions of social support involve contexts in which



**FIGURE 1** Schematic illustration of the Interpersonal Model of Capitalization (InterCAP). Paths denoted with a solid line are strongly supported by extant research. A dashed line indicates a theorized path but a relative gap in knowledge. All paths have underlying mechanisms and moderators

stress or adversity is buffered and the primary goal is to alleviate negative outcomes (Cobb, 1976; S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). When people discuss positive events with others, their goal is to sustain, prolong, or augment these positive emotions (Rimé, 2007), and perhaps also to strengthen their relationship with responders. More recent theoretical accounts broaden the definition of social support to include both adverse and non-adverse contexts (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2015). Within this framework, social support is not limited to a return to homeostasis in adverse contexts (Carver, 1998; Epel, McEwen, & Ickovics, 1998; Feeney & Collins, 2015)—it can also be an opportunity to grow from the experience in a positive way (e.g., learning from mistakes, being resilient and optimistic in the face of adversity; Feeney & Collins, 2015; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Similarly, support providers can facilitate support-seekers' growth and not simply alleviate their negative affect. In contrast, non-adverse contexts (e.g., capitalization) are characterized by the pursuit of growth and prosperity in the absence of adversity (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Despite the expansion of social support to include both adverse and non-adverse contexts, Feeney and Collins (2015) suggest that, “each support process occurs in a different life context, involves different support functions, and results in different immediate outcomes that, over time, make independent contributions to the long-term thriving outcomes” (p. 10). As such, and consistent with research indicating that appetitive and aversive processes represent related yet conceptually distinct processes (Gable & Reis, 2001), the constellation of affective, motivational, and behavioral mechanisms that underlie the process of capitalization is distinguishable from traditional definitions of social support.

## 2.2 | What motivates capitalizers to capitalize?

Although we elaborate later how recent research has explored this question, early work relied on two motivational models: the fundamental need to belong and sociometer theory. Humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and capitalizing with others is one way to satisfy this need, inasmuch as another person's encouragement implies inclusion. Moreover, according to sociometer theory, self-esteem is an internal gauge of the extent to which people perceive themselves to have value as a relational partner and thereby can anticipate satisfying their belongingness needs (Leary, 2010; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Retelling one's good news to others, especially significant others, may be one way to boost this sociometer, both because the good news being relayed indicates one's value and because the process of sharing signifies to a partner that one values the relationship. From an evolutionary perspective, capitalizing may facilitate the fundamental goal of creating and maintaining cooperative alliances (i.e., coalition formation) by increasing one's perceived social value (Delton & Robertson, 2016; Kenrick, Maner, & Li, 2005). Capitalization also offers individuals an opportunity to restore their relational value when their sociometer alerts them via negative affect and lowered self-esteem that their relational value has dipped (Leary, 2010), but this compensatory strategy should not obscure the more fundamentally appetitive functions of capitalization.

## 2.3 | What are the theorized benefits of capitalization?

In addition to satisfying belongingness needs and refilling sociometers, successful capitalization interactions produce positive emotions (Gable et al., 2004; Langston, 1994; Reis et al., 2010). Several theories indicate that positive emotions are adaptive and will enhance health and well-being, as well as personal and social growth. For example, according to broaden and build theory, positive emotions “broaden” our cognitions, attention, and actions and “build” personal, social, and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). If capitalization fosters positive affect, then it should also promote broadening and building. Another account of this association involves the idea of *thriving*, or prospering, flourishing, and progressing toward a goal despite or because of circumstances (Feeney & Collins, 2015). Thriving is theorized to derive in part from the positive support that a partner can provide, such as through responsive capitalization interactions (Feeney & Collins, 2015). A similar idea is expressed in theories that describe how partners' encouragement of individuals' personal goal-striving can foster goal attainment and personal growth (Fitzsimons, Finkel, & VanDellen, 2015; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009).

## 2.4 | Brief summary of early findings (pre-2010)

Most early research on capitalization focused on the capitalizer. In a seminal article, Gable et al. (2004) showed that sharing good news with others is associated with greater positive affect (path A; see also Langston, 1994) and is common. In Gable et al.'s study, people retell the best thing that happened to them each day to another person between 60% and 80% of the time, and other studies have found similar values (e.g., Reis et al., 2010). These and other researchers also found that sharing good news is associated with a variety of positive intrapersonal (path A) and interpersonal (path B) outcomes, particularly when capitalizing with a responsive partner (mediation of paths A and B through CDA' and CDB', respectively). Intrapersonally, capitalizing with a responsive partner is associated with greater positive affect, life satisfaction, feelings of acceptance, and subjective well-being, and lesser negative affect (path CDA'; Cohen, Smith, & Reis, 2009; Gable et al., 2004). Perceiving a partner to be responsive during a capitalization attempt has been linked to several interpersonal outcomes, including greater satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, relationship quality, and perceived responsiveness, and lesser relationship dissolution (path CDB'; Bermis, 2008; Gable et al., 2006, 2004).

## 2.5 | The interpersonal model of capitalization (InterCAP)

Though understanding capitalizers' outcomes is important, it represents only one part of the capitalization process. What is needed instead is a model that formally emphasizes the *interpersonal* (paths E and F) and *iterative* (paths G, H, and I) processes underlying capitalization. Although these two principles are not novel, their integration into a theoretical model of capitalization is. As will be evident, below, these additions not only help organize existing research but also reveal gaps in the literature.

Interdependence theory provides a broad framework to understand the interpersonal nature of capitalization interactions highlighted by InterCAP. A core tenet of interdependence theory is that dyads form a regulatory system in which individuals' goals, pursuits, affect, and outcomes can depend on and spread to their partners (Holmes, 2002; Kelley et al., 2003; see also Butler & Randall, 2012; Fitzsimons et al., 2015; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Reis, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000). Moreover, responding to good news, especially in communal relationships, may increase the likelihood that partners will in turn be supportive during a time of need (path H; Clark & Aragón, 2013). Thus, applied to capitalization research, interdependence theory suggests that both capitalizers' and responders' outcomes are influenced by the ways in which capitalizers retell their good news and how responders react to that retelling (Paths CDA', CDB', CE, and CF).

InterCAP also emphasizes the *iterative* nature of capitalization by drawing upon Rusbult's model of mutual cyclical growth and Feeney and Lemay's theory of emotional capital (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Rusbult, Coolsen, Kirchner, & Clarke, 2006; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999; see also Gable & Reis, 2006). By iterative, we refer to a repeated and ongoing process by which both capitalizers and responders influence their own and each other's needs, thoughts, motives, and behaviors over time (paths G, H, and I), with prior interactions influencing subsequent interactions. Capitalizing with responders who are perceived to be responsive is expected to encourage future capitalization attempts and inspire capitalizers to be responsive when the roles are reversed (paths G and H). Similarly, responsive responders may be more willing to disclose their own good news in turn, and to continue to be responsive to their partners' future capitalization attempts (paths H and I). Finally, capitalizing on each other's good news can serve as a positive emotional investment, accruing emotional capital that promotes positive relationship development and success and buffers against future relationship threats (paths G, H, and I).

## 3 | INTRAPERSONAL OUTCOMES FOR CAPITALIZERS

InterCAP suggests two primary ways in which capitalization may lead to intrapersonal benefits for capitalizers: through the act of sharing good news with responders (path A) and by perceiving enthusiasm, support, and

responsiveness in their response (mediation of path A through CDA'). Capitalizing has been associated with a variety of intrapersonal outcomes including well-being, happiness, and health (A. Cohen et al., 2009; Gable et al., 2004; Maisel & Gable, 2009), particularly when the capitalization attempt is explicit (Pagani et al., 2015). Recent research has replicated and extended these early findings. Capitalizing with a partner who is (or perceived to be) responsive and enthusiastic has been associated with greater positive affect, life satisfaction, self-esteem, happiness, and perceptions of shared reality, along with lesser negative affect and loneliness (paths A and A'; Lambert et al., 2012; Mikelic, Zee, Rossignac-Milon, Bolger, & Higgins, 2018; Monfort et al., 2014; Otto, Laurenceau, Siegel, & Belcher, 2015; Reis et al., 2010; see also Gentzler, Ramsey, Yuen Yi, Palmer, & Morey, 2014, for similar findings among adolescents). Moreover, not only do people tend to capitalize on the most positive event of their day, they also capitalize on seemingly small events—for example, describing an enjoyable TV show one saw—and the association between capitalizing and positive intrapersonal outcomes holds when controlling for the importance and/or positivity of the capitalization event (Reis et al., 2010, Study 5; see also Gable et al., 2004). Moreover, as we describe next, researchers have responded to Gable and Reis's (2010) call to unpack the underlying reasons as to why capitalization leads to positive outcomes (mediators of paths A and A') and to determine the social contexts and individual differences that modify the relationship between capitalization and positive outcomes (i.e., moderators of paths A and A').

### 3.1 | Mechanisms

Rime (2009) proposed, and research later confirmed, that people share positive emotions with others to enhance the positive feelings associated with that event and to accrue positive feedback and attention from others (e.g., Duprez, Christophe, Rime, Congard, & Antoine, 2014). Research is consistent with the idea that similar motives apply to capitalization. In a series of experiments, Reis et al. (2010) provided causal evidence that sharing good news does in fact increase the perceived value of those events, especially when responders are attentive and enthusiastic (paths A and A'). As for accruing positive feedback from others, capitalizing with a responsive (vs. unresponsive) other is associated with greater happiness and life satisfaction (path A') and also positive *interpersonal* outcomes (discussed more below) like greater trust, perceived responsiveness, and willingness to engage in future self-disclosures (path B'; Lambert et al., 2012; Reis et al., 2010). Surprisingly, however, there is little research examining the underlying motives of capitalization attempts.

Sharing good news with others may also serve as a diagnostic indicator of whether and how responders will provide support in a time of need. When capitalizers perceive others in their social network to respond well to their good fortune, they expect them to also be more supportive when negative events occur (path B'; Gable, Gosnell, Maisel, & Strachman, 2012). Thus, capitalization may be critical early in relationships as partners assess each other's potential for future support. Indeed, evidence suggests this to be the case (Logan & Cobb, 2013), and we discuss these findings in more detail in Section 5.

In related research that provides a more direct test of the underlying mechanisms for path A', Demir and colleagues found that perceiving friends to respond enthusiastically and responsively to good news increased happiness, an association that was mediated by friendship quality (Demir, 2015) and satisfaction of basic psychological needs (Demir, Haynes, & Potts, 2017). In other words, capitalization fosters relationship quality, which in turn contributes to individual emotional well-being. Capitalization may also increase resilience, defined as the ability to recover quickly from stress, maintain relationships with loved ones, and learn from adversity (path A). In a daily diary study, Arewakiporn, Zautra, and Sturgeon (2016) found that experiencing positive interpersonal events was associated with sharing that enjoyment with others, which increased positive affect and self-perceived resilience.

### 3.2 | Moderators

Processes involved in capitalization are likely to be influenced by individual differences that may interfere with or facilitate a person's ability or willingness to capitalize or to respond to partners' capitalization attempts. Recent work has identified several such moderators.

### 3.2.1 | Self-esteem

Capitalizers do not indiscriminately choose their targets (path C). Although capitalizers tend to choose close others (e.g., romantic partners, best friends, family members) the majority of the time (Gable et al., 2004), capitalizers are less likely to share their good fortune with responders who are perceived to have low self-esteem (MacGregor & Holmes, 2011). This unwillingness applies mostly to accomplishments rather than good things that just “happened,” likely because capitalizers anticipate that responders with low self-esteem will not respond well (notwithstanding evidence to the contrary) and because describing accomplishments might make responders with low self-esteem feel unworthy or incompetent (MacGregor, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2013). This inability to capitalize may be one reason why perceptions of partners' low self-esteem are associated with relationship dissatisfaction and instability (path CDB'; MacGregor & Holmes, 2011).

Smith and Reis (2012) found that capitalizers with low self-esteem perceive responders as less enthusiastic when sharing news after a relationship-threatening interaction or conflict (path D). Capitalization is an important vehicle by which partners can restore relationship harmony and good-will following adverse relationship events (e.g., disagreements or betrayals), but individuals with low self-esteem may be less likely to avail themselves of this strategy. This pattern is consistent with evidence showing that individuals with low self-esteem doubt their partners' regard when their sense of relationship security is threatened (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006).

It is sometimes suggested that social media may be one avenue through which individuals with low self-esteem can circumvent the difficulties or anxiety associated with face-to-face interactions. However, initial evidence suggests that this is not the case. Although individuals with low (vs. high) self-esteem use Facebook just as often (if not more) and perceive it to be a safe place to disclose, they are more likely to offer negative posts, and less likely to offer positive posts (Forest & Wood, 2012). That is, individuals with low self-esteem are less prone to use Facebook as a setting to capitalize.

### 3.2.2 | Attachment

Individuals high in attachment avoidance harbor a distrust of others and are uncomfortable with closeness. Given that capitalization fosters closeness and trust (paths B and B'), these situations should activate attachment-related defenses for highly avoidant individuals. Consistent with this reasoning, individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to perceive their partners as less responsive during capitalization attempts (path D; Gosnell & Gable, 2013; Shallcross, Howland, Bemis, Simpson, & Frazier, 2011) and report being less thankful and more embarrassed as a result of their partners' response (path A'; Gosnell & Gable, 2013).

Attachment anxiety, characteristic of individuals who strongly desire intimacy but worry about their partner's love and commitment, also moderates capitalization processes. Gosnell and Gable (2013) found that on days in which responders enacted above average capitalization support, capitalizers high in attachment anxiety reported greater increases in life and relationship satisfaction, but they also reported feeling more ashamed and indebted to their partners, less thankful, and less understood (paths A' and B'). Thus, while individuals high in anxiety seemed to benefit from relying on their partners' support, they remained vigilant for potential signs of rejection. This fear of rejection may be a self-fulfilling prophecy, in that responders with partners high in social anxiety report being less enthusiastic and supportive in response to a capitalization attempt (path C; Kashdan, Ferrisizidis, Farmer, Adams, & McKnight, 2013).

### 3.2.3 | Depression

Hershenberg, Davila, and Leong (2014) proposed competing hypotheses about how depression might be associated with capitalization. One possibility was that depression might lessen the emotional benefits of capitalization, while, on the other hand, individuals with greater (vs. lesser) depressive symptoms might benefit more from capitalizing, presumably because they have more positive emotions to gain and negative emotions to lose. Researchers found evidence for both options. Individuals with more depressive symptoms were less willing to capitalize. However, when

obligated to capitalize with a responsive confederate, individuals with greater depressive symptoms experienced greater increases in positive emotions and decreases in negative emotions (path A').

### 3.2.4 | Relationship context

In a provocative study, researchers found that capitalization may be associated with varied motivations to consume alcohol, depending on whom individuals are capitalizing with (Mohr, Arpin, McCabe, & Haverly, 2016). More specifically, un-partnered individuals paired with relatively unresponsive (vs. responsive) responders tended to consume greater amounts of alcohol to prolong positive emotional experiences and to engage positively with others (path A'). However, partnered capitalizers with responsive (vs. unresponsive) partners were more likely to drink only to prolong the positive feelings (path A'), suggesting that for these individuals, levels of engagement may already be sufficiently high.

## 4 | INTRAPERSONAL OUTCOMES FOR RESPONDERS

One novel aspect of the InterCAP is its emphasis on intrapersonal benefits not just for capitalizers (paths A and A') but also for responders (path F). To date, few studies have examined the potential benefits for responders despite theoretical reasons to do so. Individuals who empathize with others' emotions often report feeling similar emotions themselves (e.g., emotional contagion; Christophe & Rimé, 1997; Hatfield et al., 1994; Levenson & Ruef, 1992). Also, when close others receive good news, individuals may "bask in reflected glory" (Tesser, 1988) and feel happy about a close other's good fortune. Moreover, responding to good news, especially in communal relationships, may allow responders to anticipate that partners will in turn be responsive during a time of need (path H; Clark, 1984). Yet another reason is that people tend to feel good about themselves when they are compassionate and supportive to others (e.g., Reis, Maniaci, & Rogge, 2017).

Preliminary evidence supports this hypothesis. Hicks and Diamond (2008) found that on days when their partners shared their most positive events of the day, participants reported greater positive affect themselves (path F). When responding to their partners' good fortune, responders reported feeling greater positive affect, lesser negative affect, and higher self-regard (path F; Smith, 2012). Monfort et al. (2014) found that both capitalizers and responders reported more positive and less negative emotions following an encouraging capitalization conversation (paths A and F). Moreover, responders who reported empathizing with others' positive emotions reported more positive emotions themselves (path F; Andreychik & Migliaccio, 2015). More work is needed to support this claim, particularly research that examines actual capitalization interactions.

### 4.1 | Mediators

Why do responders react positively to their partners' retelling? Self-expansion theory suggests that people have a basic motivation to expand their self-efficacy and may do so by including close partners into their self-concepts (Aron, Lewandowski, Masheck, & Aron, 2013). Thus, when responders hear capitalizers' good news, they should be motivated to convey responsiveness and pride, maximizing their sense of inclusion with the other and contributing to their own self-efficacy by "basking in reflected glory" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Tesser, 1988). In support of this proposition, research has found that people like making others feel good, often increasing their own positive emotions in the process (Brewer & Kramer, 1985; Halevy, Bornstein, & Sagiv, 2008; Zaki & Williams, 2013). However, self-expansion theory and capitalization have yet to be formally integrated, suggesting a fruitful avenue for future research.

Responders may also reply enthusiastically for more self-serving reasons. For example, in one study, Netzer, van Kleef, and Tamir (2015) brought participants into the lab to ostensibly play a game with same-sex partners. In one version of this game, participants had a better chance of receiving a monetary prize if their partners performed well.



Participants who thought their partners would do better on the task if happier attempted to enhance their happiness. It is possible that similar self-serving biases apply during capitalization attempts. Responders may feel that their relationships will be stronger and more personally satisfying if they respond enthusiastically to a capitalizer's good news, consistent with social norms about friendship (Argyle & Henderson, 1984). We return to this topic in Section 7.

## 4.2 | Moderators

Only two studies have examined moderation of capitalization effects on responders. In the first, Shallcross et al. (2011) found that responders high in attachment anxiety underestimated their own responsiveness, particularly when responding to highly avoidant disclosers (path F). Shallcross et al. speculated that avoidant capitalizers might not give responders enough information to determine if they are responding appropriately or effectively. Moreover, the avoidant-anxious pairing was likely problematic because those high in anxiety demand and criticize their avoidant partners, who in turn withdraw and disengage, thus impairing the potential for future capitalization (paths G and I). In the second study, Kashdan et al. (2013) found that individuals high in social anxiety are also less likely to provide enthusiastic responses. Other individual differences seem likely to moderate the extent to which responders are able or willing to sacrifice, a topic we return to in Section 7.

## 5 | INTERPERSONAL OUTCOMES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Accumulating evidence suggests that capitalization is integral to relationship satisfaction and growth (paths B, B', and E). Recent studies have shown that capitalization attempts are associated with greater relational well-being, connection, security, and acceptance (Gable et al., 2012; Pagani et al., 2015), particularly when the attempts are explicit (Pagani et al., 2015). Greater perceptions of capitalization support are associated with greater relationship satisfaction, commitment, love, and appreciation (path B'; Fivecoat, Tomlinson, Aron, & Caprariello, 2015; Hershenberg, Mavandadi, Baddeley, & Libet, 2016; Kashdan et al., 2013; Lambert et al., 2012). Responders who believe they supported their partner also show increased relationship satisfaction and commitment (path E; Kashdan et al., 2013). Moreover, responders who reported empathizing with others' positive emotions expressed greater willingness to help needy others and were more engaged in making others happy (path E; Andreychik & Migliaccio, 2015). In a rare longitudinal study, perceiving a partner to be responsive led to greater relationship satisfaction 1 year later (path B'; Logan & Cobb, 2013). This association was moderated by relationship duration, such that capitalization was more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction early in relationships. This is a key finding because early capitalizing may contribute emotional capital that provides a foundation for developing trust, mutual intimacy, and positive emotions, as well as buffering against future relationship threats (paths G and H; Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Gable et al., 2004). Indeed, in one study where participants imagined having a hypothetical roommate who exhibited positive empathy, participants perceived their partner positively, partially because they envisioned their hypothetical roommates responding well to future capitalization attempts (paths G and H; Andreychik, 2017). Moreover, individuals who viewed their partners as good capitalizers also viewed them as good support providers in the face of bad news (Logan & Cobb, 2013).

Capitalization may also provide an important resource for couples when they are dealing with stressful events. For example, couples coping with breast cancer felt higher daily intimacy when their partner shared good news (paths B and E; Otto et al., 2015), even after controlling for sharing about the cancer itself. Additionally, the more capitalizers and responders perceived their partner to be responsive, the more intimate they felt (paths B' and E; Otto et al., 2015). Similarly, distressed dyads undergoing couples' therapy reported greater relationship satisfaction post-therapy when partners reported providing greater capitalization support (path E; Hershenberg et al., 2016). In a daily diary study, Walsh and colleagues found that on days of greater relationship threat, couples who had accumulated more positive moments (some of which may have included capitalizing on good news) with their partners maintained



relationship satisfaction levels compared to couples with fewer positive moments (Walsh, Neff, & Gleason, 2017). Thus, capitalization may help couples remain positive in the face of threat and build emotional capital during stressful times (Feeney & Lemay, 2012).

## 5.1 | Moderators

Everyone may not easily reap benefits from capitalization. For example, anxiety may disrupt the capitalization process. In one study, individuals high in social anxiety were viewed by both themselves and their partners as unenthusiastic and disinterested following a capitalization attempt. As a result, their partners reported sharper declines in relationship quality and were more likely to terminate the relationship 6 months later (Kashdan et al., 2013). It seems plausible that avoidant partners would be viewed similarly. In another study, individuals high in attachment anxiety reported greater relationship satisfaction on days in which they perceived receiving more responsive capitalization support (Gosnell & Gable, 2013). However, as mentioned earlier, anxious individuals were not as thankful and felt more ashamed and indebted to their partners, all of which seem likely to undermine relationship well-being over time. Moreover, individuals high in avoidant attachment were reported by their partners and rated by coders as being less responsive, especially when their partners were high in anxious attachment (path B' and E; Gosnell & Gable, 2013).

## 6 | INTERVENTIONS

Kurt Lewin is widely attributed to have said, "(i)f you truly want to understand something, try to change it." In this spirit, researchers have begun to develop and test interventions that teach partners how to respond effectively to capitalization attempts. In one study, Woods, Lambert, Brown, Fincham, and May (2015) randomly assigned participants and their study partners (friends or romantic partners) to receive a capitalization intervention or a control intervention. The capitalization intervention was an audio-guided PowerPoint presentation that explained the value of capitalizing on good news and being enthusiastic and genuine when responding to these attempts. In the control condition, the PowerPoint presentation described the importance of discussing common interests and asked couples to discuss television programs over the next 4 weeks. Over this epoch, dyads in the capitalization intervention perceived their partners to have higher relationship satisfaction (paths B' and E), which was mediated by perceiving partners to express more gratitude (path E). However, the intervention did not significantly affect gratitude receipt or individuals' own relationship satisfaction.

In related research, Conoley, Vasquez, Bello, Oromendia, and Jeske (2015) developed an intervention in which participants received a 30-min training session that taught them how to recognize positive messages from partners (e.g., accomplishments, positive relationships) and how to celebrate those messages through verbal and nonverbal enthusiasm. Individuals were then told either to celebrate others' good news at least once a day for a week or to refrain from celebrating. Responders who celebrated with capitalizers during a capitalization attempt felt greater positive emotions compared to days in which they did not celebrate (path F). Moreover, greater self-reported genuineness in celebrating with capitalizers and more celebrations were uniquely associated with greater positive emotions for responders (path F). Supporting the mediational component of path F, the association between the number of celebrations and positive emotions experienced by responders was mediated by the capitalizers' positive reaction to the celebrations.

Taken together, these studies suggest that responsive behavior can be taught, and that such interventions may be beneficial for both capitalizers and responders. Indeed, capitalization has been proposed as one way to boost resilience and attenuate symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011) and is recommended by leading researchers in positive psychology as a way to enhance happiness (e.g., Lyubomirsky, 2008). However, additional experimental work is needed that specifically targets underlying mechanisms of capitalization (e.g., increasing emotional capital, fostering friendship quality, satisfying belongingness needs, refilling the sociometer,

greater inclusion of the other in the self) and includes rigorous control groups tailored to the mechanism being tested. Additionally, more work is needed to develop stronger implementations of capitalization, consider its durability over time, and examine individual differences in the extent to which this intervention is effective for some individuals/couples and not for others. Of importance will be comparisons of capitalization interventions either as an adjunct or as an alternative to more traditional, conflict-focused treatments for distressed couples. Future research should also teach responders *and* capitalizers why it is important to share positive news with others, how to communicate capitalization attempts to others (e.g., be explicit; Pagani et al., 2015), and what beneficial outcomes to expect when capitalization is successful.

## 7 | FUTURE DIRECTIONS

### 7.1 | Gaps revealed by InterCAP

In addition to integrating past theoretical accounts and formally introducing interpersonal and iterative components to the capitalization process, InterCAP also reveals current gaps in the literature (see dashed lines of Figure 1). Below, we suggest ways in which InterCAP can serve as a guide for future capitalization research.

#### 7.1.1 | Path B

One focus for future research concerns the extent to which the act of capitalizing leads to interpersonal outcomes beyond, or irrespective of, the responder's response. This is an important question, since, under certain circumstances, a responsive partner may not be required to reap interpersonal benefits. For example, individuals may capitalize with some of their friends, and the increases in trust and commitment they gain from that interaction may extend to other friends or their romantic partner. There may also be times when capitalizers share good news without expecting a response (e.g., informing employees about a company's booming business, posting good news on social media, or sending a birth announcement to loved ones). Even without a responder, examples such as these illustrate that the act of capitalizing may nevertheless enhance the perceived value of relationships to capitalizers (Cheung, Gardner, & Anderson, 2015).

Research should also examine circumstances under which capitalization attempts have undesirable outcomes (cf. paths A, E, and F). An obvious example occurs when the responder reacts weakly, critically, or inauthentically (Gable et al., 2004) or when one person's good news has negative implications for the other—for example, a promotion at work that will require one's partner to assume greater family responsibilities. A less obvious example might include good news that potentially alters mutuality of dependence (e.g., one partner receives tenure while the other does not; responders appear to take credit for something the capitalizer has accomplished on his or her own).

More broadly, the ways in which capitalizers retell their good news (e.g., using an affectively neutral vs. exciting tone, taking excess credit for the event vs. expressing some humility about one's good fortune) and when they choose to capitalize (e.g., immediately following a conflict with a romantic partner) should be robust predictors of the negative and positive outcomes reaped from the capitalization attempt. Initial evidence suggests that sometimes individuals attempt to capitalize for self-serving reasons, as in the case of boasting. In one study, participants read about the possibility of experiencing a positive event and then were asked how they would respond to the news (Palmer, Ramsey, Morey, & Gentzler, 2016). Participants were likely to retell their news to others, especially via social networking sites, and individuals—particularly men—intended to retell their news by bragging. Interestingly, sharing news via social media and bragging were positively associated with narcissism. Furthermore, bragging was associated with lower levels of conscientiousness, agreeableness, and empathy. Capitalization attempts may therefore be perceived in a negative light. An important avenue for future research will be to examine the extent to which capitalization attempts serve self-presentational as opposed to relationship-enhancing goals. Such research seems particularly timely given the likelihood that mass-sharing via social networking sites may not lead to the same emotional benefits

or intimacy as in-person or one-on-one interactions with close and caring others (Gentzler, Oberhauser, Westerman, & Nadorff, 2011; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Responders may be more likely to interpret capitalization attempts on social media as self-promotional bragging, which presumably would incur costs rather than benefits. Finally, it will also be useful to examine perceiver variables—for example, some people may be more envy-prone, which might be more likely to manifest in the less present interpersonal context of reading about someone else's good news (as opposed to talking with them face-to-face).

### 7.1.2 | Path C

How do people know with whom to capitalize and under what circumstances? Recent evidence suggests that people can identify specific individuals who help them regulate particular emotions—that is, when individuals experience particular emotions, such as sadness or anxiety, the names of individuals who help them regulate that specific emotion come to mind more easily (Cheung et al., 2015). This specificity may apply to capitalizing on good news, although it is unclear which attributes help to identify partners more likely to be preferred when good news is salient—for example, is one's relationship with the potential responder or his/her anticipated response more influential? Moreover, to what extent does this choice reflect explicit, deliberate or implicit, automatic processes? Subsequently, are people more likely to turn to these individuals who come to mind more easily when they want to capitalize? Do capitalizers suffer greater negative consequences if they choose the “wrong” responder? Does having a greater number of people to capitalize with heighten or attenuate intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits?

### 7.1.3 | Paths E and F

Above, we reviewed evidence showing that responders may reap some of the same intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits as capitalizers do (e.g., Monfort et al., 2014; Otto et al., 2015). Future research should continue to explore other potential benefits for responders, as well as unpack the underlying mechanisms and moderators of these benefits.

#### Potential mechanisms

One possibility is that responders may benefit because they “include others in themselves” (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991)—that is, people in close relationships incorporate their partners' resources, perspectives, and identities with their own. Because capitalization attempts are typically directed at close partners (Gable & Reis, 2010), responders may experience their partners' good news as something shared between them, over and above any overt personal benefits of the good news for responders. Consistent with this idea, studies have shown that close partners feel good when their partners succeed at a task, even when that success implies outperformance of oneself (Beach et al., 1996).

Another possible mechanism that may help explain benefits for both responders and capitalizers is gratitude. Research shows that receiving a partner's gratitude on 1 day predicts increases in feelings of relationship quality and connection on the next day (Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). Thus, when capitalizers express gratitude to responders, responders may feel rewarded in a way that “reminds” and “binds” them to each other, encouraging a mutually rewarding cyclical process for future capitalization attempts and enthusiastic responses (paths G, H, and I).

#### Potential moderators

Although anxiety appears to be a key moderator in determining benefits for responders and capitalizers (Kashdan et al., 2013; Shallcross et al., 2011), several other potential moderators seem like “low-hanging fruit” for future research. For example, greater trust, relationship satisfaction, and commitment should promote capitalization attempts, more enthusiastic responses, and greater intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits for both capitalizers and responders. Another relevant trait is empathy, since the ability to appreciate and reflect on the capitalizer's experience should affect responders' emotional and behavioral responses. Conversely, traits such as shyness, narcissism,

and envy-proneness may undermine the potential benefits of capitalization. For instance, shyness could both undermine a responders' enthusiasm and a capitalizers' willingness to initiate a capitalization attempt.

### 7.1.4 | Paths G, H, and I

When constructing InterCAP, we drew on Rusbult's model of mutual cyclical growth and Feeney and Lemay's theory of emotional capital (Feeney & Lemay, 2012; Rusbult et al., 2006; Wieselquist et al., 1999; see also Gable & Reis, 2006) to suggest that capitalization attempts that lead to intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits should beget future capitalization attempts and enthusiastic responses. However, only one study has demonstrated this critical longitudinal component. Children (third through seventh grade) who perceived responders to be enthusiastic to their academic successes were more willing to disclose academic successes and felt more supported by their peers over time (Altermatt, 2017). In romantic relationships, research suggests that capitalization may play a more critical role in the early stages of relationships (Logan & Cobb, 2013).

In a larger sense, we see value in integrating capitalization research with Fitzsimons et al. (2015) model of transactive goal dynamics. These authors propose that interdependent relationships be considered as a single self-regulating system, such that each partner's goal striving influences, and is influenced by, the other's goal striving and support. Although their model speaks most directly to interwoven goals, for which both partners' behavior is directly relevant, it also suggests that striving toward relatively more individualistic goals and accomplishments should be understood according to its impact on both partners. In this light, each partners' anticipation of the other's response may play a critical role in shaping their goal-directed activity—whether, for example, they choose to pursue one or another goal, and whether they pursue that goal openly and wholeheartedly or surreptitiously and halfheartedly. These anticipations are, of course, greatly affected by prior experiences in their relationship.

## 7.2 | Other outstanding questions and new theoretical ideas

InterCAP, like all existing studies of capitalization, begins with the retelling of a positive event. This assumption is similar to the social support literature, in which the provision of social support is a response to verbal accounts of a negative event or displays of distress, thereby making one's need known. What is largely unknown in both literatures is the role of the *responder* in initiating these interactions. A partner can initiate support or capitalization interactions by inquiring about events of the day, or if a partner has knowledge about an event that occurred that day, he/she may ask about the event specifically. Individuals ask their partners, "How was your day?" on about 80% of days, which may be a simple, frequent, and powerful catalyst for capitalization attempts that helps convey care (Cortes & Wood, 2018). Of course, the greater the interdependence and intimacy of relationship partners, the more likely they are to be aware of one another's routines and goals. Interactions in which the responder initiates the capitalization process may be particularly beneficial inasmuch as they demonstrate active interest in the recipient's well-being.

Whether or not a potential responder initiates a capitalization (or support) interaction depends to some extent on their ability to notice changes in their partners' emotional expressions. The ability to accurately infer another's thoughts and feelings is often referred to as empathic accuracy (Ickes, 1993). Empathic accuracy, as well as the responder's motivation to employ that accuracy, likely influences whether potential responders will attempt to elicit a capitalization attempt from a partner. Empathic accuracy also depends on a target's expressivity (e.g., Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2008), suggesting that future research should adopt a broader, dyadic perspective to examine contextual and person variables of both capitalizers and responders in terms of when and how a capitalization interaction (or social support) interaction begins.

Although emotion expression and the capitalization process share considerable overlap, future research could distinguish between expressing positive emotions (e.g., "I feel happy") versus retelling a positive event (e.g., "I got a promotion"). For example, the association between responders' responses to capitalization attempts and the intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits reaped by both capitalizers and responders is likely to be predicted by the extent to which positive emotions are expressed by the capitalizer. A capitalizer could jump for joy, be content and calm, or be

sobbing as he/she tells a responder about a promotion, all of which would be likely to shape the responder's response.

Although there is little work investigating potential negative consequences for the responder, recent evidence indicates there may be instances in which providing support and being responsive can have drawbacks. In a series of studies, Gosnell and Gable (2017) found that responders who were more concerned about the effectiveness of their responses and who regulated their emotions more exhibited less self-control. In another study, couples engaged in a discussion in which one person had hypothetically gotten into her/his dream job or graduate school program (Peters, Reis, & Jamieson, 2018). Responders exhibiting greater physiological signs of avoidance-motivated threat during the discussion engaged in less responsive behavior (Peters et al., 2018). These findings are highly consistent with research on the difficulties of providing responsive support (e.g., Rafaeli & Gleason, 2009) as well as evidence on caregiver burden (Grunfeld et al., 2004). Future research should consider other possible ways in which responding to capitalization attempts may have detrimental consequences.

Research should also examine capitalization processes in more diverse types of relationships. Nearly all the research reviewed above was conducted with romantic partners or close friends. Nevertheless, capitalization also seems relevant in other common relationship types. For example, Cohen et al. (2009) found that university students who felt that their parents were more enthusiastic about their successes were also higher in life satisfaction and positive affect. Similar studies with younger children also seem likely to yield valuable insights (e.g., Altermatt, 2017). Capitalization also seems relevant to the work setting, where workers' performance and happiness may be influenced by their coworkers' and supervisors' responses to their personal successes.

A final item for future research addresses how capitalization processes may differ by culture. For example, research by Kim, Sherman, and Taylor (2008) suggests that in more collective cultures, people may be relatively more reluctant to seek social support explicitly and they tend to benefit more from support that is provided without explicit reference to a negative stressor. Other work indicates that, relative to people from western countries, East Asians are more likely to dampen their positive emotions or not savor them, presumably because displays of personal achievement are considered hubristic in those cultures (Miyamoto & Ma, 2011; see also Miyamoto, Ma, & Wilken, 2017 for a review). Similar cultural moderation may apply in a capitalization context, suggesting the need for studies of capitalization in collective cultures. In addition, no work has examined the impact of SES on capitalization processes, even though SES often affects close relationship processes (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; Maisel & Karney, 2012). Maisel and Karney note, for example, that individuals low (vs. high) in SES may be unable to pay for relationship counseling when a major conflict arises or health care expenses when a family member gets sick. These financial strains put an added burden on low SES couples and exacerbate relationship conflict. Perhaps couples low in SES also engage in less and/or poorer capitalization attempts and responses that further exacerbate the negative consequences of lower SES.

### 7.3 | Concluding remarks

A hallmark of human sociality is the desire to share good news with others. In this article, we reviewed research and advanced a new theoretical model—the interpersonal model of capitalization or InterCAP—to help explain how the retelling of good news influences both capitalizers and responders. We hope that InterCAP helps spur additional research on this quintessentially interpersonal process.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Langston also described several other ways in which people seek additional benefits from their personal good fortune. The present review is limited to interpersonal means of doing this; that is, sharing good news with others.
- <sup>2</sup> Avid readers of capitalization research will note that we forego the two-dimensional model of responses to capitalization attempts, wherein individuals can be active-passive and constructive-destructive, because being active and constructive shares substantial overlap with the concept of being responsive (e.g., Gable et al., 2006).

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