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### Person-by-Situation Perspectives on Close Relationships

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### Abstract and Keywords

This chapter reviews theories and research that have adopted interactional (person-by-situation) approaches to studying close relationships. Interactional thinking in social and personality psychology is discussed from historical and contemporary perspectives, emphasizing ways in which individuals and situations intersect. Three theoretical models that adopt person-by-situation frameworks applied to important interpersonal processes are reviewed: the cognitive–affective personality system (CAPS) model, interdependence theory, and attachment theory. The chapter explains how and why person-by-situation approaches have increased our understanding of individuals within relationships. Specific research programs are highlighted. This research has revealed that certain types of situations elicit unique reactions in people with specific dispositional strengths or vulnerabilities. Collectively, these research programs indicate that one can neither predict nor understand how individuals think, feel, or behave in relationships without knowing the relational context in which they are embedded. The chapter concludes by discussing some new directions in which interactional-based thinking might head.

Keywords: person-by-situation models, close relationships, cognitive–affective personality system (CAPS) model, attachment theory, dependency/risk regulation model, interdependence theory

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## Introduction

Every psychological event depends upon the state of the person and at the same time on the environment, although their relative importance is different in difference cases.

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Lewin (1936, p. 12)

Kurt Lewin was the founder of several disciplines in psychology, including social and industrial/organizational psychology. He was, however, much more than a founding father. Lewin was a visionary who, with the development of field theory (Lewin, 1948), sought to explain how forces that reside both within individuals and in their immediate environments propel them to act in certain ways in their everyday lives. Thirty years after his famous dictum that behavior cannot be understood unless one considers both who a person is and the environment in which he or she is embedded, psychologists remained embroiled in debates about what explained more variance in social behavior: the dispositions that people have or the situations in which they find themselves (see Mischel, 1968; Wicker, 1969). The answer, of course, was sketched in Lewin's writings decades earlier. The central theme of this chapter echoes one of Lewin's most important insights: To fully understand *how and why* individuals behave as they do, one must know who they are (e.g., their traits, motives, dispositions, values, attitudes); the situation(s) to which they are responding; and how these variables *combine* (statistically interact) to influence how individuals think, feel, and ultimately behave.

In this chapter, we discuss several theories and programs of research in relationship science that have adopted interactional (person-by-situation) approaches to understanding and predicting social behavior. Several excellent examples of how (p. 568) person-by-situation models can advance in the flourishing close relationships literature our understanding of how and why individuals behave as they do. One of the main reasons for this is that relationship partners are often the most salient and important "feature of the environment" to which individuals respond across many social situations. Accordingly, most of our attention centers on person-by-situation models and effects within the domain of close relationships.

The chapter has four sections. In the first section, we overview interactional thinking in social and personality psychology, highlighting different approaches to the study of personality and social behavior and discussing how individuals and situations intersect (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). In the second section, we review three major theoretical models that are good exemplars of person-by-situation frameworks and offer insights into how and why the dispositions of one or both partners ought to affect what happens in specific social and dyadic contexts: the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) model (Mischel & Shoda, 1995); interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978); and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Each of these theories addresses how specific personality traits or individual differences are likely to *combine* with certain situations to jointly affect how one or both partners in a relationship thinks, feels, or behaves in a given situation.

In the third section, we discuss how different person-by-situation approaches have expanded our understanding of individuals within relationships, focusing mainly on romantic relationships. In particular, we review research on self-esteem and dependency/risk regulation processes (S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) in addition to research

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documenting how promotion and prevention orientations (Higgins, 1998) operate in different kinds of interpersonal contexts. We then turn to a long-term program of research that has tested diathesis–stress predictions grounded in attachment theory (Simpson & Rholes, 2012, 2017). Each of these research programs has shown that certain types of situations routinely elicit unique responses in relationship partners who have specific dispositional strengths (e.g., high self-esteem, greater attachment security) or vulnerabilities (e.g., low self-esteem, greater attachment insecurity). Collectively, this research reveals that one can neither predict nor understand how individuals think, feel, or behave without knowing the specific social situations that relationships partners are confronting and how they perceive and interpret each situation. We conclude by suggesting new directions in which interactional-based thinking might head, highlighting how Snyder and Cantor’s (1998) functionalist perspective could be applied to studying relationship dynamics.

## Interactional Perspectives in Psychology

Social and personality psychology have distinct historical origins (Jones, 1985), partly because each field started with different missions and goals. Social psychology began as an enterprise geared to understand how factors external to individuals affect the way in which they think, feel, and behave. Gordon Allport (1968, p. 3), for example, defined social psychology as the “attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others.” Personality psychology, in contrast, wanted to determine how forces that reside *within* individuals guide their behavior over time and in different situations. Being both a social and a personality psychologist, Allport (1937, p. 48) also offered a foundational definition of personality, referring to it as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his [*sic*] unique adjustments to his environment.”

One element these two definitions share is what Lewin (1948) addressed in field theory: the principle forces that impel people to *move* through the life space. Social and personality psychology both address how and why individuals are motivated to think, feel, and behave in response to forces in their environments, with personality psychology emphasizing forces that reside within individuals (e.g., their traits, needs, motives, desires), and with social psychology focusing on forces that exist outside individuals in their immediate environment (e.g., social norms and roles, situational presses and expectations, other people). Lewin, however, also presumed that personality traits affect what people attend to, perceive, interpret, remember, and react to in different social situations. Personality, therefore, should also affect the meaning and potential impact that certain situations have on individuals who possess certain traits, dispositions, or motives. This explains why Lewin developed and used manipulation checks in studies; he understood that persons and situations were inextricably connected in more profound

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ways than many people assume. Today, the premise that behavior is the result of characteristics of both the person and the situation is almost universally accepted (Deaux & Snyder, (p. 569) 2012; Snyder & Cantor, 1998). This is especially true in relationship science, where relationship partners often constitute the most prominent and important feature in the environments of most individuals. Moreover, the effects of some personality traits (e.g., agreeableness) cannot be observed unless individuals are in situational contexts that allow for the expression of their traits (e.g., contexts that permit agreeable people to cooperate with others).

Three general strategies have historically been used to investigate how personality and social situations intersect: the dispositional strategy, the interactional strategy, and the situational strategy (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). The oldest strategy, the dispositional one, reveals how specific traits or dispositions influence how individuals think, feel, and behave, both over time and in different social settings. This strategy was used in pioneering research on trait constructs such as the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950); need for social approval (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960); and Machiavellianism (Christie & Geis, 1970). One key feature of the dispositional strategy is that it identifies individuals who regularly and consistently display certain social behaviors that presumably reflect the influence of the trait(s) being studied (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). Although the dispositional approach has generated many interesting and important findings (see Snyder & Ickes, 1985), it has limitations. The dispositional strategy, for example, is rather atheoretical and, in some cases, tautological (e.g., evidence for possessing the trait of extraversion is sometimes inferred from the fact that certain people talk more than others). The dispositional strategy also focuses heavily on whether and how certain dispositions affect how people think, feel, and behave while neglecting important situational factors. For this reason, studies that rely on just the dispositional strategy often explain little variance in most social behaviors.

Realizing that most personality traits (Mischel, 1968) and attitudes (Wicker, 1969) explain only about 10% of the variance in most behaviors, psychologists returned to Lewin and began using what is now known as the interactional strategy. In addition to Lewin's field theory, critical elements of the interactional strategy were also evident in other early lines of work, including H. A. Murray's (1938) model of needs and motives, Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs, and Neisser's (1967) cognitive research, all of which inspired the motivated cognition movement (see Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1982; Endler, 1982). Consistent with Lewin, each of these theorists claimed that dispositions should affect how individuals perceive and interpret the meaning of certain social situations, depending on their current needs and motivational states. This explains why the interactional strategy considers both dispositional *and* situational information when specifying when and why certain traits or motives should—or should not—be moderated by (i.e., statistically interact with) certain types of situations, resulting in consistent, predictable *context-dependent* patterns of thought, feeling, and action. Indeed, when dispositions and

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situations are measured and modeled properly, up to 80% of the variance in behavior can be explained (Snyder & Cantor, 1998).

According to the interactional strategy, different types of moderating variables exist, two of which are most relevant to this chapter: (a) strong versus weak situations and (b) precipitating versus nonprecipitating situations. *Strong situations* have clear and distinct norms, rules, or expectations that indicate how individuals ought to behave in a given situation (e.g., appropriate behavior at funerals, what to do when the national anthem is played). These strongly role-governed situations reduce the influence that dispositions have on behavior, suppressing the effects of individual differences. *Weak situations*, on the other hand, have fewer rules, norms, or expectations regarding how one ought to behave in the situation (e.g., a party at a friend's house, an encounter with a stranger in a waiting room). Consequently, weak situations allow dispositions to exert greater influence on behavior because situational forces are ambiguous or largely absent. Person-by-situation interaction effects are, therefore, more likely to emerge when a disposition is relevant to the situation being investigated and when the situation is neither too strong nor too weak.

The second major moderating variable in the interactional strategy is whether situations are precipitating or nonprecipitating. *Precipitating situations* shift the cause of a behavior to a particular disposition, which then alters, amplifies, or mutes how an individual responds to it. For example, certain types of situations (e.g., a rowdy party) may lead certain people (e.g., extraverts) to act on their schemas (working models) associated with extraversion, leading them to think, feel, and behave in a more boisterous and lively manner. Precipitating situations, which are also known as “situational moderating variables,” operate when (a) features of the situation are theoretically relevant to the disposition; (b) the situation makes the schema(s) (p. 570) underlying the disposition salient guides to behavior; and (c) the situation is not too strong and permits different types or degrees of responding, depending on whether an individual scores high, moderate, or low on the disposition.

The third major investigative approach is the situational strategy (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). This strategy attempts to explain consistencies and regularities in social behavior by examining how individuals who have different dispositional tendencies select, alter, or manipulate the social situations that affect their lives. The situational strategy is a dynamic version of the interactional strategy, but one that considers the reciprocal nature of situations and dispositions (Snyder & Ickes, 1985). This strategy therefore addresses not only how situations affect dispositions, but also how dispositions shape the micro- and macroenvironments in which people live. In close relationships, for example, the situational strategy has confirmed that individual differences associated with self-monitoring affect how high and low self-monitors choose friends as activity partners (Snyder, Gangestad, & Simpson, 1983) and evaluate prospective romantic partners (Snyder, Berscheid, & Glick, 1985). Other research has demonstrated that certain

personality traits systematically affect the choice of long-term mates (e.g., Buss, 1984), which then affect long-term relationship outcomes (e.g., Caspi & Herbener, 1990).

## Major Interactional Theories

Given the compelling, intuitive logic of interactional approaches, one might expect they would exist in many areas of psychology. While they have informed some important topics, interactional strategies are not as prevalent as one might expect. There are several reasons for this state of affairs.

To begin, most research in social and personality psychology has not been anchored in broad theoretical frameworks that specify how and why certain situations should have *precipitating* effects on specific people. This problem has been complicated by the fact that, unlike personality traits, we still do not have a good taxonomy or sound understanding of the fundamental types of social situations that influence individuals in their daily lives (for an exception, see Kelley, Holmes, Kerr, Reis, Rusbult, & Van Lange, 2003). Fortunately, a few major relationship-based theories have incorporated both person and situation variables, making the relationships field an exemplar of how the interactional approach can be applied to generate novel, important insights into person-by-situation effects. This movement has been facilitated by recent advances in data analytic methods (see Kenny & Kashy, 2014; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), which now allow researchers to design and test person-by-situation models much more easily and precisely than previously. New repeated-measures techniques for diary studies, for example, now permit researchers to track individuals across time as they and their partners encounter different situations in their interpersonal lives over time (e.g., Bolger & Romero-Canyas, 2007).

We now highlight three major theories. We first discuss Mischel and Shoda's (1995) CAPS model, which is one of the most prominent and best exemplars of how person-by-situation approaches can be adopted to further our understanding of when, how, and why certain situations reveal patterning and consistency in the social behavior of certain people. Following this, we review two major theories that have deep interpersonal roots: interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). Both of these theories make specific predictions about how certain dispositions should interface with certain types of situations to generate unique patterns of thought, feeling, and action. Relationship partners are often important and salient features of the daily environments of most individuals. This introduces some interesting complications in that (a) each partner's dispositions (e.g., traits, motives, needs, desires) become an important element of the other partner's immediate situation/environment; (b) the dispositions of *both* partners must be taken into consideration; and (c) the *beliefs* that individuals have about their partner's needs and dispositions may

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determine what happens, independent of whether these beliefs reflect the partner's actual needs or dispositions.

### The Cognitive-Affective Personality System Model

Many traditional personality approaches assume that people's dispositional characteristics remain stable across different situations and social contexts. People's behavior associated with virtually all traits and motives, however, varies considerably across contexts and situations (Mischel, 1968). To determine whether these individual differences are generated by transitory situational factors or by people's enduring personality characteristics, researchers have often averaged trait-related behaviors across many situations. Such averaging reveals the extent to which people differ in their (p. 571) overall level of trait-related behavior, but it does not allow one to test situation-specific predictions, such as when, where, and why certain patterns of behavior differ (Mischel, Shoda, & Mendoza-Denton, 2002). An averaged summary score for a person's level of agreeableness, for example, can reveal that a highly agreeable person tends to be more accommodating than other people over different contexts (e.g., when negotiating a business deal with a client or vacation plans with friends). However, it does not identify significant exceptions to a person's global action tendencies, such as situations in which he or she responds in less friendly or more confrontational ways (e.g., during certain conflicts with a romantic partner or difficult negotiations with business partners).

To generate predictions that move beyond understanding overall average differences in behavior, Mischel and Shoda (1995) proposed the CAPS model (see also Mischel, Mendoza-Denton, & Shoda, 2002). Instead of treating situational variability as noise or error variance that conceals the stability and consistency of personality across situations, the CAPS model assumes that intraindividual variability of behavior across situations reflects an enduring, dynamic personality system, one that incorporates rather than ignores the influence of situations (cf. Cervone, 2004).

The CAPS model focuses on situations as they are perceived by individuals (Kelly, 1955), and it explains *why* certain situations have unique effects on certain people. According to the model, individuals have mental representations, or cognitive-affective mediating units (CAUs), that exist within a large network of associations and constraints known as CAPS networks. CAUs are the stable units of personality. They contain people's construals, goals, expectations, beliefs, and emotions with respect to different situations, others, and the self. They also contain self-regulatory standards, competencies, plans, and strategies (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Once activated (or inhibited), CAUs guide the way in which individuals interpret and construe a given situation or person and automatically trigger cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to that situation or person. Each person has a fairly stable activation network among the units within the system, which reflects his or her social (e.g., early caregiving experiences, culture) and biological (e.g., temperament, genes) background.

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One core assumption of the CAPS model is that mental representations contain conditional “if-then” properties, such as *if I encounter X, then I will do Y*, and every individual has a unique if-then profile, which constitutes his or his *behavioral signature* (Mischel, 1999). Examining children in naturalistic situations, Shoda, Mischel, and Wright (1994) have shown that children’s if-then profiles are distinct and stable across time. Moreover, Chen (2003) has confirmed that the more familiar individuals are with someone, the more others are thought of in conditional terms. People also think conditionally about themselves. If a person experiences a situation that is closely linked with a specific behavior or action tendency in an if-then manner, the behavior or action tendency is more likely to be displayed. If, for example, a highly anxious person perceives her partner’s fishing trip with friends as abandonment or neglect, she should display habitual clingy or angry behaviors.

The CAPS model, therefore, reconceptualizes personality traits as consisting of specific if-then behavioral profiles that specify what a given person is most likely to do when exposed to specific situations. Individual differences emerge in two ways. First, people differ in the accessibility of their schemas and the situational cues that trigger their schemas. When in a specific situation, different schemas should be activated in different people, leading them to perceive different aspects of the same situation or to interpret the same situation differently. A partner’s “ambiguous” comment about one’s appearance before a formal event, for instance, may be construed as rejection by one individual, but as a neutral comment by someone else. Different schemas can also be elicited in different individuals when interacting with a particular person. For example, when individuals meet new people who resemble significant others from their past, specific schemas associated with prior significant others are often activated. These schemas then elicit if-then profiles that lead individuals to respond to new people as they would with prior significant others, such as parents or siblings (Andersen & Chen, 2002). Second, the pattern of linkages and strength of associations between situations and behaviors that have been established should differ between people. Even if two people share the same view of a given situation (e.g., interpreting a partner’s ambiguous remark as rejection), their *behavioral* responses can differ considerably. One person, for instance, might respond with anger or hostility, whereas the other might react with silence or withdrawal. To predict behavior, therefore, researchers must determine (a) how a person construes the situation (which is influenced by his or her schemas and their (p. 572) accessibility) and (b) the person’s specific situation-behavior linkage (i.e., his or her unique if-then profile) (Shoda et al., 1994).

The CAPS model focuses on regularities in within-person cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses in specific social contexts. The assumption that different cognitive-affective representations are activated in different situations explains what often seem to be contradictory traits in the same person (Fleeson, 2001, 2004). For example, fearful-avoidant individuals (who have negative views of themselves and significant others) might display dismissive behavioral tendencies in one situation, but anxious-ambivalent qualities (e.g., neediness) in another situation. Identifying if-then profiles also allows researchers to capture important exceptions to people’s global behavioral tendencies and

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to pinpoint the situations that typically elicit or inhibit trait-relevant behaviors. For example, given their negative expectations about the responsiveness of others, avoidantly attached individuals should be reluctant to enter certain social situations. Consistent with the CAPS perspective, Beck and Clark (2009) have confirmed that highly avoidant persons sidestep social situations that offer information about how others evaluate them (socially diagnostic situations), but enjoy socializing with others in *nondiagnostic* social situations. Zaki, Bolger, and Ochsner (2008) have also documented that trait affective empathy (individuals' tendency to experience others' emotions) predicts empathic accuracy (individuals' tendency to accurately assess others' emotions), but only in specific situations (when others express emotions directly and clearly).

Because relationship partners typically are a major part of one another's immediate situation/environment, the CAPS model can easily be extended to dyadic contexts. To the extent that a person's "situation" consists largely of his or her partner's behavior, the interpretation and psychological experience of the situation (i.e., the partner's behavior) should be influenced by the individual's CAPS network, which should affect his or her behavioral response to the partner. The partner should then experience and interpret this response via his or her own CAPS network, which in turn produces another behavioral response. The behavior of an individual, therefore, often emerges from the *interaction* between the individual and his or her situation, which often is the behavior of his or her partner.

Zayas, Shoda, and Ayduk (2002) have translated Lewin's seminal equation to close relationships. The behavior of one partner ( $B_1$ ) emerges from the interaction between his or her dispositional characteristics ( $P_1$ ) and the situational input (i.e., his or her partner's behavior,  $B_2$ ), such that  $B_1 = f(P_1, B_2)$ . The behavior of the second partner is conceptualized in parallel fashion as  $B_2 = f(P_2, B_1)$ . If, therefore, an individual's immediate environment consists mainly of his or her partner's behavior,  $E_1$  becomes a function of the individual's own behavior ( $B_1$ ) and his or her partner's characteristics ( $P_2$ ). The partner then interprets and responds ( $B_2$ ) to the individual's initial behavior, so that  $E_1 = f(P_2, B_1)$  and  $E_2 = f(P_1, B_2)$ . As partners interact across time, the "interlocking" of their respective CAPS systems ought to create a dyadic system, within which the dispositional characteristics of each individual are embedded and from which each individual's behaviors—as well as the unique behavioral patterns of the dyad—eventually emerge (Zayas et al., 2002). As partners interact more often and spend more time together, attention to and encoding of the partner's behavior increases. Because of this, the situational input for one's own behavior increases in psychological significance over time, resulting in stable and predictable *interaction signatures* of relationships. If, for instance, an individual's partner consistently criticizes him or her for having a drink with dinner, this might repeatedly activate a specific subset of the individual's CAPS network ("If I have a drink, then X criticizes me), which elicits a specific response, such as defensiveness. Over time, the thoughts and emotions in the individual's CAPS network associated with this situation should become more accessible, and the behavior

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(defensiveness) might be triggered by very minimal input from the partner (e.g., just a casual glance by the partner at dinner elicits defensiveness).

People's dispositional characteristics also predispose them to select, evoke, or manipulate certain situations (Buss, 1987), including the partner and his or her behavior, which might amplify or sustain dispositional characteristics. If, for example, an individual's behavior is consistent across time (e.g., he or she always withdraws during relationship conflicts), the individual's *partner* will be repeatedly exposed to situations that activate the same thoughts and emotions within his or her relevant CAUs (e.g., "if there is conflict, then my partner pulls away and we grow apart"). This pattern ought to evoke specific behavioral responses in the partner (e.g., approach behavior in an attempt to reestablish intimacy). This behavioral response may then be a situational trigger for the other person, who may construe the partner's approach behavior as threatening, which generates more withdrawal and (p. 573) perpetuating (or exacerbating) this cycle. Because the patterns among cognitions and emotions in CAPS networks can also reflect the influence of individuals' own interpersonal histories, the CAPS model can incorporate constructs associated with both attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) and interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

In sum, the CAPS model is a broad person-by-situation framework that explains how situations can interact with personality traits and individual differences to improve our ability to predict and understand certain trait-behavior linkages. According to the model, personality is the stable patterns of behavior that result from certain trait-situation pairings, which are routinely activated by certain situations. One limitation of the CAPS model is that it does not explain why, from an ontogenetic perspective, certain situations ought to trigger certain patterns of thoughts, feelings, or behaviors within specific people. Other theories are needed to explain when, how, and why certain situations elicit the key personality signatures of people who have certain traits or motives. This is where interpersonal theories such as interdependence theory and attachment theory make important and novel contributions.

### Interdependence Theory

Interdependence theory, which was developed by two of Lewin's students (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), is one of the major theories within social psychology that addresses how people and their environments interact, resulting in specific behavioral decisions. According to interdependence theory, when two people decide what to do in a given situation, their choices should depend on (a) the type of situation the partners are in and (b) each partner's needs, motives, or dispositions in relation to the other. The specific type of situation that two people are in can affect the degree to which they depend on one another for good outcomes and, therefore, have the capacity to affect each other's outcomes in the situation (i.e., their degree of *interdependence*). The interpersonal dispositions or orientations of each partner (e.g., each partner's traits, motives, values, attitudes, and beliefs) should also affect how each

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partner perceives, interprets, and makes decisions about what to do in the situation. Thus, the dispositions of *each* partner should be “functionally relevant” to how each partner thinks, feels, and acts, depending on the features of the situation at hand (Holmes, 2002).

One of the main obstacles to studying persons and situations has been identifying the core dimensions on which social situations vary. Indeed, a chief limitation of Mischel and Shoda’s (1995) CAPS model is that it does not offer a “theory of situations” specifying *why* certain personality traits should be activated when certain individuals are exposed to certain situations (Holmes, 2002). On the person side, there is a good taxonomy of the major personality traits (e.g., the Big 5) and several basic interpersonal orientations (e.g., attachment orientations, self-esteem). On the situation side, however, a good, clear taxonomy of situations does not exist, mainly because there are hundreds, if not thousands, of possible situations that differ on a host of unique dimensions. Kelley et al. (2003) have used interdependence theory to identify approximately 20 “prototypical situations” that have unique outcome patterns and distinct qualities. Some of these prototypical situations (e.g., those involving principles of exchange, investment, threat, trust) are encountered on a fairly regular basis in daily life and might be systematically associated with important relationship processes and outcomes.

Figure 23.1 shows one common relationship-relevant situation known as “exchange with mutual profit” (Holmes, 2002). The values in each cell reflect each person’s (each partner’s) level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with each behavioral choice, with each partner having two options from which to choose. In the example shown in Figure 23.1, if both partners select Option 1 (both decide to clean the house), each partner benefits by 10 points because the house gets cleaned while the two partners enjoy spending time together. This cooperative choice entails a reciprocal exchange in which each partner shares equally in the largest total benefits

		Person A	
		a <sub>1</sub>	a <sub>2</sub>
Person B	b <sub>1</sub>	10	0
	b <sub>2</sub>	0	5

[Click to view larger](#)

Fig. 23.1 Mutual exchange with profit situation.  
Reprinted with permission from Holmes (2002).

(p. 574)

in any of the four cells (i.e., the partners share 20 points). One or both partners may, however, prefer Option 2 (not cleaning the house), which would yield 5 additional points (15) if the other partner chooses Option 1 (cleans the house by himself or herself) and, in doing so, receives no benefits (or perceives costs if he or she feels

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treated unfairly). This “exchange” situation pits motives to cooperate against motives to maximize personal gains, and it is one of several fundamental relationship-relevant situations (Kelley et al., 2003).

Each of the 20 situations identified by Kelley and colleagues (2003) varies on six situation dimensions (Holmes, 2002). As displayed in Table 23.1, the first dimension, the *degree of interdependence*, indexes the extent to which each partner can influence the quality (goodness) of his or her partner’s outcomes in that situation. The greater the potential for influence, the more interdependent partners are in that situation. Relationships in which partners are more interdependent across many different situations tend to be closer because partners have stronger and more frequent impact on each other across different life domains (Kelley et al., 1983). The second dimension, *mutuality of dependence*, reflects the degree to which partners have equal versus unequal power over each other in that situation. Greater mutuality of dependence signifies equal power in the situation, whereas less mutuality reflects unequal power. The third dimension, *correspondence of outcomes*, reflects the extent to which each partner has similar versus conflicting initial interests in the situation prior to any negotiation. More correspondent situations are typically easier to resolve because the initial behavioral choice that is best for one partner is often best for the other partner, so there is little if any need for compromise. The fourth dimension, *basis of control*, involves the degree to which partners can control each other’s outcomes in the situation by using exchange principles (e.g., by making promises or threats) or coordinating their activities (e.g., when one partner starts dinner and the other does the next logical steps in the sequence). The fifth dimension, *temporal structure* of decision-making, reflects how soon decisions will have consequences for one or both partners after a decision is made. Some decisions have immediate consequences (e.g., deciding to have life-altering surgery), whereas others take years to emerge (e.g., deciding whether to have children). The sixth dimension, *degree of uncertainty*, involves the extent to which partners are uncertain about the long-term outcomes of a decision due to incomplete information or lack of knowledge. In uncertain situations, for example, partners cannot forecast whether their current decisions will or will not result in the outcomes they anticipated or desire.

Each of the six situation dimensions listed in Table 23.1 has a “function of rule,” and each one is relevant to a particular set of interpersonal dispositions. For situations that differ in the degree of interdependence, the functional (operative)

Table 23.1 Dimensions of Situations and Interpersonal Dispositions (reprinted with permission from Holmes, 2002)

<b>Dimension of Situation</b>	<b>Function of Rule</b>	<b>Interpersonal Disposition</b>
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1. Degree of interdependence 2. Mutuality of interdependence	Increase or decrease dependence on partner	Avoidance of interdependence/ Comfort with dependence
3. Correspondence of outcomes	Promote prosocial or self-interested goals	Cooperative/competitive Responsive/unresponsive
	Expectations about partner's goals	Anxiety about responsiveness/ Confidence or trust
4. Basis of control	Control through exchange (promise/threat) or coordination (initiative/follow)	Dominant/submissive Assertive/passive
5. Temporal structure	Promote immediate or distant goal striving	Dependable/unreliable Loyal/uncommitted
6. Degree of uncertainty	Cope with incomplete information or uncertain future	Need for certainty/openness Optimism/pessimism

(p. 575) decision rule is whether to increase or decrease dependence on the partner in that situation. Which decision is made should depend on the degree to which one or both partners are dispositionally inclined to avoid interdependence (as is true of avoidantly attached people) or to seek it (as is true of securely attached people). For situations that differ in mutuality of interdependence, the functional rule is to promote either prosocial goals or self-interested goals. Which decision is made should depend on the degree to which one or both partners have a cooperative versus a competitive orientation or a

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responsive versus unresponsive orientation toward other people, especially their partner. For situations that differ in correspondence of outcomes, the functional rule centers on expectations of the partner's goals or what he or she wants to achieve. Accordingly, decisions ought to revolve around the degree to which individuals are concerned about whether their partners are sufficiently responsive to them and how much confidence and trust they have in their partners. For situations that differ in the basis of control, the functional rule is whether control of the partner's outcomes occurs through exchange or coordination tactics. Which decision is made should hinge on the degree to which one or both partners are dominant versus submissive or assertive versus passive. For situations that differ in temporal structure, the functional rule is to facilitate either immediate or distant goal striving. The decision followed should be based on the degree to which one or both partners are dependable versus unreliable or loyal versus uncommitted to one another. Finally, for situations that vary in degree of uncertainty, the functional rule is how to interpret incomplete information or unknown future events. The decision that is rendered should depend on the degree to which one or both partners has a high need for certainty, is open to new experiences, or is optimistic about future events occurring.

In summary, for each of the six situation dimensions, specific interpersonal dispositions, including interpersonally relevant personality traits and relationship orientations, should become salient and guide how individuals construe certain situations and make decisions when in them. Cast another way, situations differ in how relevant they are to certain dispositions and in how likely they are to elicit the expression of certain dispositions (Holmes, 2002). People who prefer autonomy and emotional independence in relationships, for instance, should dislike or feel uncomfortable in situations that call for greater interdependence. These situations ought to activate the relationship-relevant schemas and working models of these individuals, which should motivate them to act in ways that *decrease* their dependence on their partners, especially in situations that could generate greater interdependence. Preferences for autonomy and emotional independence, however, should not become activated and guide thoughts, feelings, and behavior in other types of situations.

## Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) began developing attachment theory after observing the damaging effects that long-term caregiver-child separations had on children. He surmised that the need to form attachment bonds with primary caregivers is an innate, biologically based tendency that was selected during evolutionary history because it increased the probability of surviving the perils of childhood. The tendency to seek physical and psychological proximity to attachment figures (e.g., primary caregivers, romantic partners) is one of the fundamental tenets of attachment theory. According to Bowlby (1969, 1973), virtually all children and adults are motivated to seek some form of contact with their attachment figures, particularly when they are distressed, threatened, or feel overwhelmed (Kobak & Duemmler, 1994).

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Some of the earliest attachment research focused on relationships between young children and their mothers. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three primary types of infant-caregiver relationships: secure, avoidant-resistant, and anxious-resistant. When upset, children who have a secure relationship with their mothers gain comfort from her presence and actively use her to regulate and reduce negative affect. Avoidant children, in contrast, do not express their needs for proximity by directly seeking contact with their mothers when they feel distressed. Instead, avoidant children turn away from their mothers to regulate and dissipate negative affect and rely on other coping strategies (e.g., distraction). Avoidant behavior is conjectured to be an evolved strategy that allows children (and perhaps adults) not to place excessive demands on their attachment figures, who may be unwilling or unable to invest more in the relationship and could terminate it (Main, 1981; Simpson & Belsky, 2016).

Children who have anxious attachment relationships also do not use their mothers as a source of comfort when they are upset. Rather than avoiding their caregivers, however, anxious (p. 576) children cling to their mothers, remain distressed even after contact has been established, and do not resume normal activities, such as exploration. These behaviors indicate that anxious children are hypersensitive to separations from their caregivers, partly because they have received insufficient “felt security” in the past (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Anxious behavior may also be an evolved strategy, one designed to express emotions, needs, or actions intensely to attract and retain the attention of inconsistent, poorly motivated, or inattentive caregivers (Main, 1981; Simpson & Belsky, 2016).

As individuals grow and develop, relationship experiences become internalized in working models (schemas), which account for the relative continuity and stability seen in personality and social behavior across development (Bowlby, 1973). Working models are cognitive structures that contain an individual’s cumulative experiences in, and general perceptions of, earlier attachment relationships (Collins, Guichard, Ford, & Feeney, 2004). More specifically, they consist of episodic, semantic, and affective information about prior relationships and interpersonal events that involve (a) rules about the emotions and thoughts one has about relationship partners; (b) guidelines for how to interpret and regulate emotional experiences in relationships; (c) beliefs and values about relationships and relationship-based experiences; (d) expectations about what future relationships and relationship experiences should be like; and (e) memories and emotions associated with previous relationships. Working models guide behavior and emotional experiences in relationships, and they provide a cognitive-emotional context through which new relationship information is filtered, interpreted, and often assimilated.

Conceptually analogous attachment patterns and corresponding behaviors have also been documented in adults (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007a). In adults, attachment patterns (known as attachment styles or orientations) exist within a two-dimensional space defined by the continuously distributed, relatively orthogonal dimensions of attachment anxiety and avoidance (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). Within this two-dimensional space, greater attachment security is indexed by scoring

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lower on the anxiety and avoidance dimensions. Individuals who score high on attachment anxiety worry about losing their partners, want to have greater felt security, and are hypervigilant to signs that their partners might be pulling away from them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Those who score high on attachment avoidance worry about losing their independence and autonomy, strive to maintain control in their relationships, and use deactivating strategies when dealing with threatening events. Highly secure people typically acknowledge distress when they experience it and directly turn to significant others for comfort and emotional support to dissipate negative affect (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Highly avoidant people are less likely to acknowledge distress and usually manage negative affect by defensively withdrawing from others in a self-reliant manner. Highly anxious individuals focus on their distress, ruminate about worst-case scenarios, and remain hypervigilant to cues that their attachment figures may abandon them. Mikulincer and Shaver (2003) have translated these ideas into an elegant process model that explains how certain types of threatening events activate the working models and coping strategies associated with each attachment orientation.

One of the cornerstone principles of attachment theory is that the attachment system should reestablish felt security when individuals—either children or adults—feel threatened or distressed (Bowlby, 1973; Simpson & Rholes, 1994). Felt insecurity is a state of strong, unpleasant arousal in which individuals are upset and need comfort or support, preferably from their attachment figures (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). Bowlby (1969, 1988) surmised and experimental research has confirmed (e.g., Mikulincer, Gillath, & Shaver, 2002) that the attachment system becomes activated when individuals feel threatened or distressed. The primary activating conditions include personal factors (e.g., hunger, pain, fatigue, or illness); environmental factors (e.g., frightening, dangerous, or overly challenging events); and relationship factors (e.g., relationship conflict, the prolonged absence of an attachment figure, discouragement of proximity by an attachment figure). Each of these threatening events ought to activate components of the attachment system, such as increasing the accessibility of working models and eliciting specific behaviors designed to mitigate the source of distress and reduce negative affect (Simpson & Rholes, 1994, 2012). Accordingly, the prototypic emotional and behavioral features of secure, anxious, and avoidant people should be witnessed when they are in specific situations that trigger their working models, which contain their most important attachment-relevant concerns, expectations, and goals. Highly anxious people, for instance, should display hypervigilance (p. 577) (e.g., closely monitoring the whereabouts of their partners, ruminating about worst-case scenarios involving their partners or relationships) in situations that call into question the commitment of their partners or that make the instability of their relationships salient. Unless these situations pose extreme or clear threats to relationships (Simpson & Rholes, 1994, 2012), they should *not* activate the working models of secure or avoidant people, neither of whom worries about relationship loss or abandonment.



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In conclusion, attachment theory is a classic person-by-situation theoretical framework (Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Simpson & Rholes, 2012). It hypothesizes that the prototypical features of attachment security, avoidance, and anxiety ought to be most evident when highly secure, avoidant, or anxious individuals find themselves in situations that activate their working models. Once elicited, their working models should subsequently guide what secure, avoidant, and anxious persons do (and do not) attend to in the situation and how they process and interpret social information en route to deciding how to act.

## Interactional Programs of Research in Relationship Science

In this section, we provide a representative review of key empirical findings in the field of close relationships that have been informed by person-by-situation (interactional) models. We focus on a few programs of research that have investigated how stable individual differences (e.g., self-esteem, personality traits, attachment orientations) interact with certain situations (e.g., different types of threatening vs. nonthreatening situations) to yield specific outcomes hypothesized by major theoretical models.

We begin by describing studies that have tested predictions derived from the dependency/risk regulation model (S. L. Murray et al., 2000; S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Most of these studies have examined how individuals who score high versus low in self-esteem respond to certain kinds of threats and challenges posed to their romantic partners/relationships. Following this, we discuss recent research that has extended some of the core tenets of regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997, 1998) to relationships. We then turn to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), discussing a program of research that has investigated how and why individuals who are anxiously, avoidantly, or securely attached typically think, feel, and behave toward their romantic partners when faced with different types of attachment-relevant stressors.

### Dependency/Risk Regulation and Self-Esteem

Several studies have illustrated the value of using person-by-situation approaches to increase our understanding of important interpersonal dynamics. The long-standing program of work by S. L. Murray, Holmes, and their colleagues on self-esteem and dependency/risk regulation (reviewed in S. L. Murray & Holmes, 2011), for example, has demonstrated how situating personality processes *within* a dyadic context can elucidate the mechanisms that link certain dispositions to relationship functioning and outcomes.

Low self-esteem is a psychological vulnerability that places individuals at risk for a host of negative outcomes, such as loneliness, life dissatisfaction, depression, and hopelessness (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). In close relationships, individuals who have chronically low self-esteem perceive their partners less positively than high self-esteem individuals do (S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a), and their perceptions often grow more negative over time (S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b). On average, low self-esteem individuals also have less satisfying marriages (Fincham & Bradbury, 1993) and dating relationships (S. L. Murray et al., 1996a).

S. L. Murray, Holmes, and their colleagues have developed a model that explains *why* low self-esteem typically results in poorer relationships. According to their dependency/risk regulation model, people who differ on self-esteem interpret situations that involve interpersonal vulnerability and dependency differently. Compared to high self-esteem individuals, those with low self-esteem possess less positive and more uncertain views of themselves (Baumeister, 1993; J. D. Campbell, 1990). They also believe that their partner's positive regard for and acceptance of them is conditional, being contingent on certain attributes or conditions (e.g., "I will love you if you do X"; Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). High self-esteem people, by comparison, believe that their partner's regard and acceptance is largely unconditional.

People use these different self-views to interpret how their partners view them (S. L. Murray et al., 2000). Low self-esteem individuals typically assume that their partners see them just as negatively as they see themselves, whereas high self-esteem people presume that their partners see their positive qualities, which they also believe they possess. These reflected appraisals should become more (p. 578) pronounced in situations that raise the possibility of rejection, make one feel vulnerable, or instill self-doubt. S. L. Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, and Ellsworth (1998), for example, led people to doubt their intellectual abilities using an experimental manipulation. Low self-esteem individuals reacted to this situation with heightened worries about their partner's positive regard and acceptance. However, when self-doubts were induced in high self-esteem individuals, they perceived their partner's regard and acceptance were *stronger*, reflecting their steadfast belief in their partner's unconditional positive regard. In daily diary studies, low self-esteem individuals are also more likely to interpret ambiguous signs, such as their partner's bad mood on a given day, as evidence that they are not positively regarded by their partner (S. L. Murray et al., 2006). These findings are consistent with Mischel and

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Shoda's (1995) CAPS model, which suggests that different schemas become activated in different people in specific situations, leading individuals to focus on different aspects of the same situation or to interpret the same situation differently.

S. L. Murray et al. (2000) also proposed that reflected appraisals of the partner's regard should influence felt security. Although most people regulate closeness and dependence in newly formed relationships in a self-protective manner (i.e., they delay commitment or avoid risking vulnerability until they are fairly sure their partners will reciprocate regard and affection; S. L. Murray & Holmes, 2011), regulation processes should be different for people who differ in self-esteem. Low self-esteem individuals, for instance, should and do feel less secure about their partner's regard as the relationship unfolds (S. L. Murray et al., 2000). Thus, they may unintentionally restrict the development of stronger emotional bonds by perceiving their partners and relationships more negatively in order to protect themselves from potential hurt or rejection (S. L. Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002). High self-esteem individuals, in contrast, should and do feel more secure about their partner's regard as the relationship develops, which allows them to use the relationship for additional self-affirmation. Thus, consistent with the CAPS model, individuals who are high versus low in self-esteem should—and do—display different patterns of linkages between situations and behaviors, predisposing them to think, feel, and behave in very different ways, particularly in situations that make them feel interpersonally vulnerable.

The partner's regard can be construed as an "affordance" on which high self-esteem individuals can capitalize. The belief that their partners view them as positively as they view themselves should help high self-esteem people feel self-affirmed and even more secure about their partner's unconditional love and regard. This, in turn, should have important implications for how high self-esteem individuals interact with their partners. For example, they should (and do) perceive their partners more positively, behave more constructively, and therefore experience greater relationship well-being over time (S. L. Murray & Holmes, 2015). Low self-esteem individuals, by comparison, should be less likely to detect or act on potential affordances. In fact, their often erroneous belief that their partners perceive them negatively typically leads low self-esteem people to devalue their relationships, behave in destructive ways (e.g., by seeking excessive reassurance or acting needy), and distance themselves psychologically or emotionally from their partners to avert the rejection they anticipate (S. L. Murray et al., 2006). By so doing, however, low self-esteem people may unwittingly create the outcome they fear the most: relationship destabilization and eventual dissolution.

In summary, the dependency/risk regulation model is an excellent example of how theory and research relevant to a major individual difference variable—self-esteem—can be used to derive and test novel predictions about how certain people ought to react to situations that pose threats to the self or the current relationship. Many of the predictions and findings associated with this major program of research are consistent with core principles of the CAPS model.

### Regulatory Focus in Close Relationships

It has long been established that having greater self-regulatory control is associated with better interpersonal functioning and more positive relationships (Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone, 2004), but less is known about how different self-regulatory needs and associated goal-pursuit strategies affect relationship processes and outcomes. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) goes beyond individual differences in *how much* self-regulatory control people have and specifies *what* people are regulating toward (i.e., the needs they strive to fulfill) and *how* people prefer to do so (i.e., the kinds of goal-pursuit strategies they adopt).

The theory proposes two coexisting independent motivational systems: a promotion focus that serves (p. 579) nurturance needs through the pursuit of hopes and aspirations and a prevention focus that serves security needs through upholding duties and obligations. When people are promotion focused, they are concerned with growth, advancement, and accomplishment, and they strive to create positive outcomes and avert missed opportunities. When people are prevention focused, they are concerned with safety and responsibility, and they seek to ward off negative outcomes and preserve stable conditions. Each regulatory system can be temporarily stimulated by situations that highlight needs for advancement or security (Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998) or become chronically accessible through prolonged exposure to social environments that emphasize either one of these needs (e.g., through parenting styles or cultural norms; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Manian, Papadakis, Strauman, & Essex, 2006).

Whether activated momentarily or chronically, promotion and prevention concerns have similar psychological correlates and consequences (Higgins, 1990; but see Lisjak, Molden, & Lee, 2012). Considerable research has documented a range of psychological processes and outcomes associated with promotion and prevention (see Molden, Lee, & Higgins, 2008). Promotion-focused people are, for example, concerned with autonomy needs (Lee et al., 2000); focus on the presence and absence of positive events (Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992); prefer eager approach strategies to ensure advancement; and enact multiple strategies of goal attainment to pursue a wide range of opportunities and to avoid missing out on promising prospects (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Förster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998; Higgins et al., 1994). Prevention-focused people, in contrast, are concerned with interdependence needs (Lee et al., 2000); focus on the presence and absence of negative outcomes (Higgins et al., 1994; Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992); prefer vigilant avoidance strategies to maintain security; and enact a smaller set of proven strategies of goal attainment, even if doing so increases the risk of missing out on opportunities (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Förster et al., 1998; Higgins et al., 1994).

While the application of regulatory focus theory to the study of interpersonal relationships is still relatively recent, researchers have begun to examine how the perceptual sensitivities and strategic preferences associated with promotion and

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prevention orientations shape processes and outcomes in close relationships (see Molden & Winterheld, 2013). Studies have investigated how regulatory orientations predict the ways in which partners perceive and interact with one another not only in different situations, such as when trying to resolve a conflict (Ayduk, May, Downey, & Higgins, 2003; Winterheld & Simpson, 2011), but also when pursuing goals external to the relationship (e.g., career goals; Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012; Winterheld & Simpson, 2016).

Winterheld and Simpson (2011), for instance, used a behavioral observation paradigm to examine relations between regulatory focus orientations, partner perceptions, and conflict resolution strategies. After each partner's chronic regulatory focus orientation was measured, each couple selected an important ongoing conflict in their relationship. They then tried to resolve it during 7- to 8-minute videotaped discussions, after which each partner rated how supportive and distancing their partner was, as well as their own levels of supportiveness and distancing. Trained observers then coded the discussions for each partner's supportive behaviors and conflict resolution strategies. Highly prevention-focused individuals perceived more withdrawal/distancing behaviors and less support from their partners, and they tried to resolve the conflict by discussing concrete details that caused and contributed to it. Highly promotion-focused individuals viewed their partners as more supportive and less distancing, and they displayed more creative problem-solving and made more efforts to move past the conflict. These effects remained statistically significant when both observers' ratings of partner support and partners' ratings of their own support were controlled. This suggests that promotion-focused individuals' more optimistic partner perceptions and prevention-focused individuals' greater sensitivity to their partners' distancing behavior reflect motivated biases that serve the distinct needs for advancement and security, respectively.

The pursuit of personal, nonrelationship goals (e.g., work or academic goals) is another domain in which promotion-related and prevention-related biases and strategies should have interpersonal implications, given that many people look to their relationship partners for support. Righetti and Kumashiro (2012) showed that promotion-focused (but not prevention-focused) individuals sought more, and were more receptive to, support from romantic partners for both promotion-related and prevention-relevant goals (i.e., aspirations and duties, respectively). A behavioral study by Winterheld and Simpson (2016) in which couples (p. 580) discussed different goals revealed a more complex pattern of results. When highly promotion-focused people's aspirations (promotion goals) were more motivationally pressing (more difficult to attain), they approached their partners more, perceived greater partner responsiveness, and thus received more support from their partners (as rated by independent observers). These perceptual and behavioral outcomes were not found when highly promotion-focused individuals discussed goals that were less relevant to them (duties/obligations or prevention goals). Consistent with their preference for broad, inclusive goal pursuit strategies, promotion-focused people should view their social environment as an opportunity for goal advancement, but primarily when the motivational relevance and priority of their personal goals is high. Highly prevention-focused participants, on the other hand, did not

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approach their partners for support, but when discussing their motivationally relevant goals (duties/obligations), they perceived greater responsiveness when their partners were less distancing (as rated by independent observers). In addition, highly prevention-focused individuals were perceived, both by their partners and by independent observers, as more responsive support providers during discussions of both types of goals. Viewed together, these findings suggest that prevention-focused people might be more aware of (and concerned with) the potential interpersonal costs of their personal goal pursuits, treating perceptions of partner responsiveness as a barometer to gauge these costs.

The extent to which relationship partners fulfill each other's needs for promotion and prevention should also affect how they feel about their relationship. Indeed, Hui, Molden, and Finkel (2013) found that promotion-focused people evaluated their relationships more favorably when they believed their autonomy needs were supported, whereas prevention-focused people judged theirs more positively when they perceived greater support for relatedness needs (see also Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2009).

In conclusion, regulatory focus theory is another framework that explains how individual differences can interface with certain situations to predict interpersonal processes and outcomes. Promotion and prevention concerns orient people both perceptually and behaviorally to features of their interpersonal environments in ways that facilitate the attainment of their needs for advancement or security. Relationships can be situational affordances that allow individuals who have different regulatory concerns to enact their preferred strategies that fulfill these needs. However, relationships can also undermine the fulfillment of advancement or security needs if they frustrate—or are perceived to frustrate—the enactment of people's preferred regulatory strategies. Clarifying how and when (in which situations) relationships support or inhibit chronic regulatory orientations and how such facilitation or interference affects individual well-being and the developmental course of relationships are important directions for future work.

## Diathesis-Stress and Attachment Orientations

According to attachment theory, specific types of situations should activate certain working models, depending on a person's attachment history. Bowlby (1973, 1988) hypothesized that diathesis-stress effects should emerge in certain stressful interpersonal contexts, with greater attachment insecurity acting as the diathesis (the personal vulnerability) and with stress being indexed by how a person reacts to either a threatening situation (e.g., feeling afraid, ill, or fatigued; experiencing relationship conflict) or taxing life event (e.g., having a baby, experiencing a major relationship breakup or loss). Greater attachment security, on the other hand, should buffer people from all but the most extreme of stressful events (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998). Securely attached people have positive, benevolent working models of themselves and others, and they enact constructive, problem-focused coping strategies when they are distressed. These assets should operate as an "inner resource" (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007b) that

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allows secure people to take advantage of the attributes and resources that other people—especially their attachment figures—can provide.

How an individual reacts to a specific life stressor should depend in part on his or her relationship history, which presumably has shaped his or her working models. As discussed previously, highly anxious individuals have received inconsistent or unpredictable care from past attachment figures, especially when they were upset and needed comfort (Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). Because of these experiences, anxious individuals worry about losing their attachment figures, crave greater felt security, and remain vigilant to cues that their partners might leave them (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Consequently, they should be bothered by—and their working models should become activated in—situations that threaten the quality or stability of their relationships. Stressful situations that involve (p. 581) relationship issues (e.g., unresolved relationship conflicts, a partner's absence or discouragement of closeness) should elicit the *relational signatures*—the prototypical emotional, cognitive, and behavioral tendencies—that define attachment anxiety.

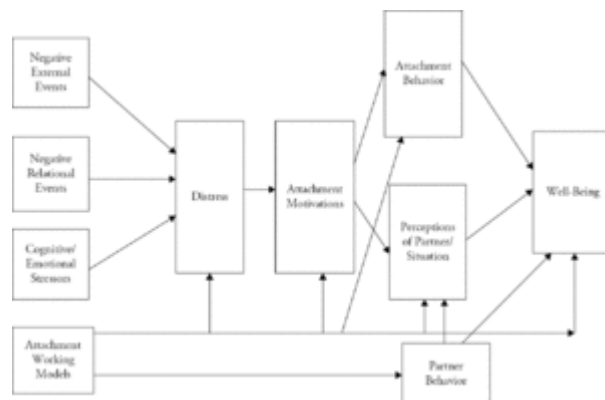
Highly avoidant individuals have been rejected by earlier attachment figures, especially when they were upset and needed help or support (Crittenden & Ainsworth, 1989). As a result, they have learned to be independent and self-reliant, which explains why they strive to be autonomous and maintain control in their relationships. One way to achieve these goals is to avoid or leave situations that could undermine their independence, autonomy, or control in relationships. Providing emotional care and support or receiving it should be one such situation (Bowlby, 1973). Highly avoidant people, therefore, should be disturbed by—and their working models should be activated in—situations that involve giving or receiving support, being emotionally intimate, or having to express their private emotions. These situations should elicit the prototypic emotional, cognitive, and behavioral features that are the hallmarks of avoidant attachment.

Highly secure individuals have received good, consistent, and predictable care from prior attachment figures, especially when they were distressed (Bowlby, 1973). In adulthood, therefore, secure individuals do not worry about relationship loss or their partners wanting to become emotionally closer to them. In fact, secure people want to forge greater closeness and intimacy with their partners (Mikulincer, 1998), which is facilitated by their use of constructive, problem-focused coping strategies. When most chronic or acute stressors are encountered, the benevolent working models of secure people should be activated (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007b). Unlike insecure individuals, however, secure people should turn to their attachment figures to help solve their problems, dissipate their negative affect, and continue enacting their plans and goals.

One program of research addressing this topic has been conducted by Simpson, Rholes, and their colleagues, who have spent years testing the attachment diathesis–stress process model (Simpson & Rholes, 2012, 2017; Figure 23.2). This work has examined the unique role that different sources of stress assume in evoking the cardinal features—the relational signatures—of attachment security, anxiety, and avoidance. According to the

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attachment diathesis–stress process model, three types of situations generate distress: negative external events (e.g., a fear-inducing situation), negative relational events (e.g., relationship conflict), and cognitive/emotional stressors (e.g., negative thoughts about something that could happen). When one of these



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Fig. 23.2 Attachment diathesis-stress process model.

(p. 582) situations arises, it should generate some level of distress in individuals, depending on how severe/threatening the situation is and the nature of the individual's working models (i.e., whether secure, anxious, or avoidant). If distress is sufficiently intense or prolonged, it ought to activate the core

attachment-relevant motivations, which should be shaped by an individual's working models. Once triggered, attachment motivations should affect the type and extent of attachment behaviors that are enacted by the individual and how he or she perceives the partner in the current situation, which may also depend on how the partner responds to the situation. The type or strength of attachment behavior and perceptions of the partner/relationship should then affect the immediate and perhaps long-term well-being of the individual, which may also be affected by the partner's behavioral reactions, both immediately and across time.

The first study to test some of the pathways in this model investigated how adult romantic attachment orientations moderated support giving and support seeking in romantic couples when one partner was waiting to engage in an "anxiety-provoking" task. Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan (1992) unobtrusively videotaped dating couples while the female partner was waiting to do an activity that, she was told, made most people feel anxious. While she waited to do the stressful task (which never occurred), her male partner waited with her, believing that he was going to do a different, nonstressful activity. After the study, observers rated how distressed and how much support each female partner sought and how much support her male partner offered. Securely and avoidantly attached partners differed considerably in the amount of support they sought and gave, depending on how distressed the female partner was during the waiting period. When women were less distressed (rated by observers), they sought less support from their male partners, regardless of their attachment orientations. If, however, women were more securely attached, they sought more support when they were more distressed, but less support when they were less distressed. Conversely, avoidant women sought *less* support when they were more distressed and more support when they were less distressed. Securely attached men provided more support when their partners were more distressed (regardless of the woman's attachment orientation), whereas avoidant men offered less



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support, especially when their partners were more distressed. Similar effects were found when the support-giving and support-receiving roles were reversed (i.e., when men waited to do a stressful task with their nonstressed female partners; Simpson, Rholes, Oriña, & Grich, 2002). Thus, corroborating specific person-by-situation predictions derived from attachment theory and consistent with the attachment diathesis-stress model, highly avoidant people were not poorer support seekers and support providers in general; instead, they were deficient only when they or their partners were upset and support seeking or giving was required. Similarly, highly secure people did not always seek or provide greater support; they did so primarily when they or their partners were upset and emotional support needed to be sought or given.

A second study investigated how relationship-based sources of stress affect conflict resolution tactics, depending on each partner's attachment orientation. Simpson et al. (1996) randomly assigned dating couples to discuss either a major or a minor unresolved problem in their relationship. Following this, each couple was videotaped as the partners attempted to resolve the problem as best they could. The discussions were subsequently coded by observers. Consistent with attachment theory and the attachment diathesis-stress model, more anxiously attached individuals reacted less positively to their partners, but only when they were trying to resolve a *major* problem that posed a potentially serious threat to their relationship. Highly anxious individuals who discussed a major problem displayed greater distress and more discomfort during their discussions (rated by observers), and they reported feeling angrier and more hostile toward their partners. Immediately following their discussions, they viewed their partners and relationships less positively in terms of the amount of love, commitment, mutual respect, openness, and supportiveness in the relationship. In addition, highly anxious women who discussed a major problem had discussions that were rated by observers as lower in quality. Thus, consistent with specific person-by-situation predictions gleaned from attachment theory and the attachment diathesis-stress model, highly anxious people did not think, feel, or behave in a less functional manner in all conflict situations; they did so primarily in stressful situations that called into question the stability or quality of their close relationships. Less anxious (more secure) individuals, in contrast, responded in a more functional manner, particularly when dealing with major relationship conflicts.

We have also investigated how attachment to one's parents (measured by the Adult Attachment Interview; AAI) is associated with the types of (p. 583) caregiving that calm secure, anxious, and avoidant people when they are distressed. Simpson, Winterheld, Rholes, and Oriña (2007) had both partners in romantic relationships complete the AAI. One week later, each couple was videotaped trying to resolve the most important current problem in their relationship. After the study, observers rated each discussion for the degree to which (a) emotional, instrumental, and physical caregiving behaviors were enacted; (b) care recipients appeared calmed by their partner's caregiving attempts; and (c) each partner appeared distressed during the discussion. Individuals who had more secure representations of their parents were more calmed when their partners gave them emotional care, especially at points when they were distressed during the discussion. Conversely, individuals who had more avoidant representations of their parents were

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more calmed by instrumental caregiving from their partners, especially at points when they were most distressed. Thus, as anticipated by attachment theory and the attachment diathesis–stress model, securely attached people benefitted more from emotional forms of support (which they probably received earlier in life), but mainly when they were distressed. Avoidant people, however, benefitted more from instrumental support (which they probably received during childhood), but principally when they were upset. Avoidant people, in other words, did benefit from certain forms of support, primarily those that did not threaten their independence and autonomy. When secure and avoidant individuals were less distressed, however, they were both receptive to other forms of caregiving.

What do highly anxious people think and feel in relationship-threatening situations that could explain why their relationships are so turbulent and unhappy? To answer this question, Simpson, Ickes, and Grich (1999) had dating couples try to infer (guess) what their partners were thinking and feeling (from a videotape of their interaction) as both partners rated and discussed slides of attractive opposite-sex people who ostensibly were interested in meeting and dating new people on campus. This task was designed to be a relationship-threatening one, particularly for highly anxious people. In this relationship-threatening context, highly anxious individuals were better at inferring the relationship-threatening thoughts and feelings that their partners were having about the attractive opposite-sex stimulus persons during the rating and evaluation task. Highly anxious people, in other words, got more directly “into the heads” of their partners in this situation, showing cognitive hypervigilance. Less anxious (more secure) persons, in contrast, were less empathically accurate in this situation. When they were more empathically accurate, highly anxious individuals perceived their relationships were less stable, reported feeling more threatened and distressed during the rating and discussion task, and reported declines in feelings of closeness to their partners after the task. Additionally, highly anxious individuals who more accurately inferred their partner’s threatening thoughts and feelings were more likely to have broken up with their partners 4 months later compared to other people in the study. In sum, this study confirmed that highly anxious people “got into the heads” of their partners and accurately inferred the relationship-threatening thoughts and feelings that their partners were having precisely when what they valued the most—their relationships—could be in jeopardy. Highly anxious people were not more empathically accurate than other people in general; they were more accurate in situations that threatened their relationships.

We have also studied how people with different attachment orientations remembered their own behavior during attachment-relevant discussions with their romantic partners. Simpson, Rholes, and Winterheld (2010) had couples engage in two videotaped discussions of major, unresolved conflicts in their relationship. Immediately following the discussions, each partner reported how supportive and emotionally distant the partner had been in the discussions. One week later, each partner returned to the lab and was asked to recall how supportive and emotionally distant he or she had been 1 week earlier. Highly avoidant individuals remembered being less supportive 1 week later, but only if they were distressed during the original discussions. Highly anxious individuals remembered being less emotionally distant, but only if they were distressed during the

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discussions. These memory biases were consistent with the fundamental needs and goals of highly avoidant and highly anxious people. Avoidant people want to limit intimacy and maintain control and autonomy in their relationships, so they remember themselves as being less supportive, particularly during difficult conversations with their partners. Anxious people, on the other hand, desire greater felt security, so they remember themselves as being less emotionally distant (emotionally closer), particularly if their conversations were difficult.

Our program of research has also investigated how attachment orientations are associated with reactions to chronically stressful life events, especially (p. 584) the transition to parenthood. For example, we have examined how the experience of having a first baby impacts the marital satisfaction of partners who have different attachment orientations (Rholes, Simpson, Campbell, & Grich, 2001). Consistent with predictions, if highly anxious women entered the transition to parenthood perceiving less support from their husbands, they experienced significant declines in marital satisfaction over the transition. If, however, they entered parenthood perceiving greater spousal support, they did not report declines. Mediation analyses have revealed that highly anxious women who enter the transition period perceiving less spousal support experienced larger drops in perceived spousal support from the prenatal period to 6 months postpartum, which in turn predicted larger pre-to-postpartum declines in their marital satisfaction. Attachment avoidance is typically not related to marital changes except when certain individuals (i.e., highly avoidant men) believe they are doing an unfair amount of childcare, a role that highly avoidant people dislike. In this circumstance, highly avoidant men who perceive they are doing too much childcare report precipitous declines in marital satisfaction over the first 2 years of the transition (Fillo, Simpson, Rholes, & Kohn, 2015).

Bowlby (1988) hypothesized that anxiously attached mothers who enter the transition to parenthood with doubts about the supportiveness of their partners should also experience postpartum increases in depressive symptoms. He reasoned that the perception of insufficient or deficient partner support was linked to deeper, more pervasive concerns about relationship loss, especially among highly anxious people. If, however, highly anxious mothers enter the transition feeling well supported by their partners, they should be buffered from experiencing depressive symptoms. Bowlby (1988) also conjectured that the association between (a) higher anxiety in combination with more doubts about the partner's supportiveness and (b) increases in depression should be mediated by (c) the degree to which new mothers perceive declines in partner support during the first 6 months postpartum. Simpson, Rholes, Campbell, Tran, and Wilson (2003) found these effects in anxiously attached first-time mothers, and Rholes et al. (2011) documented similar patterns in a second, larger transition sample that was followed 2 years postpartum.

We have also investigated marital satisfaction trajectories across the first 2 years of parenthood (Kohn et al., 2012). Using growth curve analyses for dyads, we found that highly anxious individuals showed lower or declining satisfaction when they perceived their partners were less supportive or were behaving more negatively toward them

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across the transition. For highly avoidant individuals, in contrast, satisfaction was lower or declined when they perceived greater work–family conflict or more demands from their families during the transition. The findings indicated that the insecurities of anxious and avoidant individuals predicted changes in satisfaction in these new parents, but primarily when stressors hindered the pursuit of their attachment-related goals.

Our program of work has also tested how people with different attachment orientations respond to less taxing but still stressful daily relationship events. L. Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, and Kashy (2005) had both partners in dating relationships complete daily diaries for 14 consecutive days. After the diary period, each couple was videotaped trying to resolve the most contentious unresolved problem that arose during the diary period. Highly anxious individuals perceived greater daily conflict in their relationships, significantly more than their partners did. They also reported that daily conflicts were more detrimental to the future of their relationships. Moreover, on days when they perceived greater relationship-based conflict, highly anxious individuals believed that their partners had a more negative outlook on their relationship and its future, a perception that often was *not* shared by their partners. When partners discussed the most serious conflict in the lab, highly anxious individuals both reported and were rated as being more distressed, *regardless* of how positively their partners behaved toward them (rated by observers) during their discussion. Less anxious (more secure) individuals exhibited the opposite pattern of effects in both the diary and the lab portions of this study.

In conclusion, the program of research testing the attachment diathesis–stress process model (Simpson & Rholes, 2012, 2017) has confirmed that certain types of stressful situations have unique and powerful effects on people who have different attachment orientations. Our work has examined the way in which relationship partners think, feel, *and* behave in a variety of situations, including lab-based conflict and support interactions; lab-based relationship-threatening discussions; major life transitions; and everyday life stressors. Across these different social contexts, avoidant people are not always unsupportive, withdrawn, or uncooperative with their relationship partners; rather, these defining features of avoidance are elicited by certain (p. 585) types of stressful situations (e.g., feeling pressure to give or receive support, to become more intimate, to share personal emotions). Similarly, anxious people are not always clingy, demanding, or prone to enacting dysfunctional conflict resolution tactics; instead, the cardinal features of anxiety are elicited by certain types of stressful situations (e.g., those that pose a threat to the stability or quality of their relationships). And, secure people are not always supportive, nondepressed, or inclined to display functional conflict resolution tactics; the defining features of security are observed mainly in stressful situations that activated their positive working models and constructive interpersonal tendencies.

### Future Directions

In this chapter, we have highlighted how and why a person-by-situation (interactionist) approach can yield deeper and more novel insights into important relationship dynamics, beyond what can be achieved by adopting an exclusively trait or purely situational approach. Although several interactionist programs of research exist in the relationships field, person-by-situation perspectives are by no means the norm. In fact, there are several prominent domains of theory and research in both personality and social psychology that could benefit from interactionist frameworks. Some long-standing lines of research might be enriched and expanded by infusing what we currently know about certain individual differences into extant social psychological theories and models. Other significant lines of research could be extended and refined by incorporating the functional meaning of different types of situations into personality-based theories and models.

With respect to how individual differences might inform major social psychological theories and models, let us return to interdependence theory. This comprehensive theory, which addresses how relationship partners make decisions about what to do based on the payoffs associated with doing different activities with or without the partner, has not systematically examined whether and how people who score high versus low on certain trait-like measures (e.g., self-esteem, neuroticism, attachment insecurity) perceive and respond to specific types of situations differently (see Kelley et al., 2003). Some of the apparent “error” in prior interdependence studies, therefore, could be variance that is meaningfully related to a person’s standing on “situationally relevant” trait measures. For example, when deciding what to do in situations that could reveal whether the current partner really can or cannot be trusted, individuals who are insecurely attached or have low self-esteem should perceive and react quite differently from their securely attached or high self-esteem counterparts. Anxiously attached people, for example, might regularly enter or create situations that allow them to test whether their partners can truly be trusted (Simpson, 2007), whereas avoidantly attached people may circumvent trust-diagnostic situations when possible (cf. Beck & Clark, 2009).

Emerging research within social psychology on self-regulation in social contexts (e.g., Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010) has also not yet fully capitalized on personality-centered approaches. For example, Fitzsimons and Fishbach (2010) have shown that individuals strategically adjust their interpersonal perceptions and behaviors to advance goal attainment. When they perceived that a goal was not progressing well, individuals felt closer to and directly approached others who could help them with the goal. Once progress toward the goal was made, however, individuals stopped to draw closer to goal-instrumental others (see also Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). Yet, interpersonal self-regulatory processes should vary depending on certain traits, needs, or characteristics of individuals. Regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) is one useful framework that may help explain why and how people differ in the degree to which they rely on their social

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environment to achieve self-regulatory success. Promotion focus, for example, should be one important individual difference variable that forecasts reliance on interpersonal self-regulatory strategies for goal advancement (Winterheld & Simpson, 2016).

While individual difference approaches can inform social psychological theories and models, a focus on situational influences can likewise inform theories and research that have used personality-based processes to explain behavior and outcomes in relationship contexts. Within the social support literature, for instance, empirical work has been based on the assumption that perceived support is associated with certain personality characteristics and that support experiences are, at least in part, attributable to biased construal processes (e.g., Sarason, Sarason, & Shearin, 1986). Support recipients, however, are embedded in relationships in which they affect and are affected by their partners, many of whom are their primary source of support. Hence, casting a wider “situational net” may generate a better understanding of the extent to which social support is likely to be effective and (p. 586) generate beneficial (or detrimental) intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes. Such outcomes should depend not only on the personality characteristics of the support recipient, but also on those of the support provider (e.g., his or her motivation, skills, and ability to provide effective support), the individuals’ relationship history, and how these factors interact with each other in specific support-relevant situations (e.g., Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997; Iida, Seidman, Shrout, Fujita, & Bolger, 2008).

Tracing the footsteps of Kurt Lewin, we began this chapter by proposing that, in order to fully understand *how and why* people think, feel, and behave as they do, one must know something about their core dispositions, the specific social situations they are facing, and how these variables might combine (statistically interact). As the theories, models, and research reviewed reveal, we have come a long way on the path toward understanding how certain people *intersect* with certain situations to predict unique forms of social behavior. Currently, however, we have a much better understanding of the principle traits and dispositions that characterize people than we do of the fundamental situations that affect them on a regular basis. Although inroads have been made toward developing taxonomies of the major situations that affect people as they communicate with others in different social contexts (e.g., Kelley et al., 2003), more attention and effort need to be devoted to developing, refining, and testing situational taxonomies, including how certain situations evoke the working models of people who have certain dispositions. One logical starting point is the six situation dimensions along which Kelley et al.’s (2003) 20 social situations vary (Table 23.1).

Another important direction for future research is the incorporation of person-by-situation models into broader theoretical frameworks. One such framework is the functionalist strategy (Snyder & Cantor, 1998). According to this strategy, global/enduring and specific/time-limited features of people (e.g., their traits) and the major situational factors that affect them should *jointly* affect the “agendas” that people formulate and pursue in daily life. The specific agendas that people develop based on the functional goals they possess are then translated into “action plans” intended to achieve

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important life outcomes. Most agendas fall within one of four domains: (a) individual-level agendas (e.g., clarifying one's social identity, working on important personal projects); (b) interpersonal-level agendas (e.g., getting along with others, influencing them in specific ways); (c) relationship-level agendas (e.g., developing and maintaining comfortable, fulfilling intimacy and felt security with partners); and (d) group-level agendas (e.g., working with certain groups or organizations to promote valued social causes).

Snyder and Cantor (1998) claimed that interpersonal relationships are an excellent domain within which to test functional models in light of the fact that most fundamental needs involve other people. The need to establish and maintain some degree of social connectedness is a case in point. However, the amount of social connectedness that a person seeks and maintains ought to depend on his or her specific dispositions in relation to the major life situations with which he or she is currently dealing. For example, highly avoidant individuals who live in a communal versus an individualistic culture should develop different plans and agendas for achieving and sustaining sufficient social connectedness, given the norms and expectations of the culture in which they live. Highly avoidant individuals who live in collectivistic cultures, for instance, may desire, accept, or permit greater social connectedness with others than highly avoidant persons who live in individualistic cultures (Friedman et al., 2010). This, in turn, should influence the agendas they develop and pursue at the personal, interpersonal, relationship, and group levels, each of which should be tied to important life outcomes at each level.

One of the most interesting features of the functional strategy is potential intersections and "mismatches" between agendas at different levels (e.g., individual vs. relationship, relationship vs. group). Mismatches of motivational agendas can occur within individuals or between partners, affecting the well-being of one or both partners and the functioning of their relationship. A person who is highly avoidant, for instance, is likely to have the proximal goal of maintaining independence, autonomy, and control in his or her current relationship. This preference, however, does not negate the fact that he or she may also have the more distal need/goal of remaining socially connected to other people. To carry out and ultimately reconcile these potentially competing agendas, highly avoidant people may deliberately choose to enter and avoid certain social situations.

Beck and Clark (2009) have, in fact, shown that highly avoidant individuals prefer to enter social situations that do *not* provide clear feedback about the degree to which others like or dislike them (i.e., nondiagnostic social situations), and they (p. 587) deliberately avert social situations that could provide clear feedback. In so doing, highly avoidant people not only protect themselves from possible rejection and pain, but also miss out on forming closer, more emotionally connected, and more trusting relationships. If such persons enter a relationship and continue to avoid socially diagnostic situations with their partner, they may also deprive themselves of positive feedback regarding their partner's true amount of affection and commitment for them. Without such knowledge, highly avoidant people may find it more difficult to risk themselves and become more dependent on and responsive to their partners (Simpson, 2007). Thus, their primary individual-level agenda (to maintain sufficient autonomy and independence) should affect

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the dynamics of their relationship, including their interpersonal-level agenda: to maintain sufficient social connections with others. The ultimate fate of their relationship may therefore depend on their *partner's* motivational agenda. If there is a good match of agendas between the two partners, each partner may feel satisfied with the relationship, given that each partner can be a "situational affordance" for the other (e.g., finding ways for the highly avoidant partner to maintain control and independence while still enjoying time with mutual friends). If, however, there is a glaring mismatch (e.g., the partner of the highly avoidant person demands greater closeness and intimacy), unsatisfactory outcomes are likely to follow, and the relationship could become unstable very quickly.

Motivational agendas might also be systematically related to different combinations of personality traits or characteristics *within* a person, resulting in the transformation of agendas at different levels. At the individual level, for example, highly avoidant people should want to limit emotional intimacy and remain independent so they do not have to experience the pain of further rejection. If, however, they are highly extraverted, they should be more willing to enter different types of social situations. Although their avoidance should motivate them to prefer nondiagnostic social situations, their extraversion may lead them to enter some socially diagnostic situations, which might expose them to positive feedback about the self from others. This, in turn, may disconfirm their negative expectations about the responsiveness of others, thereby weakening their individual-level agenda of maintaining independence and transforming their interpersonal-level agenda so they become more receptive to entering mutually interdependent relationships, especially with partners who allow them to maintain a comfortable amount of independence.

When considering personality traits in a *dyadic* context, personality should affect not only the consistency of an individual's behavioral responses in certain situations (as specified by interactionist approaches), but also the consistency of behaviors, thoughts, and emotions displayed in response to and elicited from relationship partners. According to this perspective, an individual's behavior is determined by actor effects (i.e., individual differences in a person's responses that are consistent across interactions with multiple partners); partner effects (i.e., individual differences in the responses a person elicits from others, which in turn affect the individual); and relationship effects (i.e., unique responses that are specific a given person and his or her partner; Malloy & Kenny, 1986). These distinctions are likely to have important implications for whether and how personality changes or remains stable over time. Individuals may, for instance, repeatedly enter relationships with partners who reinforce their dispositional characteristics. A person with low self-esteem, for instance, may repeatedly form relationships with new partners who are dominant or controlling, merely reinforcing their feelings of worthlessness. However, such individuals might occasionally choose partners who do not have these tendencies, thereby halting the reinforcement of their dispositional tendencies.



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With respect to long-term relationship functioning, the best outcomes ought to occur when partners' agendas at each of the four levels are consistent and mesh well with each other. More specifically, to the extent that each partner's individual, interaction, relationship, and group agendas are compatible and can be coordinated to achieve goals, the successful completion of one individual's agendas should facilitate his or her partner's agendas. These are just a few of the numerous directions in which the functional strategy might be profitably extended.

In closing, social and personality psychology truly have begun to merge since Lewin first proposed that what individuals think, feel, and do depends on both who they are *and* the specific life situations they are confronting. We still must gain a deeper understanding of what the principle dimensions of interpersonal situations are and the conditions under which they activate the working models that characterize different personality traits. This is perhaps the central mission of the next generation of research on personality and social behavior.

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