

## **PART IV**

### **INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

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# 12 Personality in Close Relationships

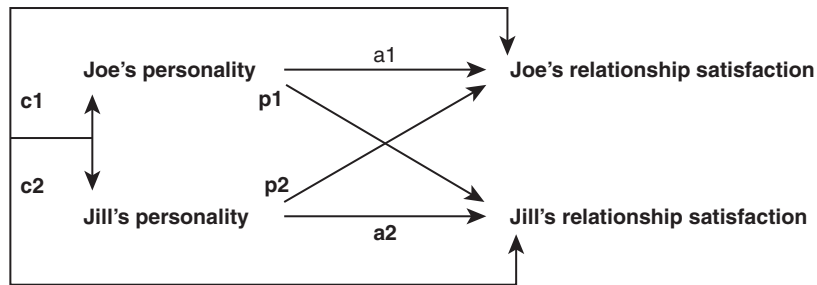
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Forming and maintaining satisfying, stable, and happy relationships with romantic partners is one of the most important tasks in adulthood. The quality of such bonds is strongly associated with both long-term health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988) and subjective well-being (Berscheid, 1999). Personality – an individual’s characteristic pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior – is one fundamental factor that shapes how people tackle this major life task, shaping the course, quality, and stability of relationships. Relationships, however, involve *two* personalities that may or not be compatible on various dimensions. Consider, for example, Jill and Joe, a hypothetical romantic couple. Jill is a very extraverted person who is open to experiencing novel and exciting people, places, and situations. She loves new adventures, spends a lot of time having fun with many different friends, and generally has an optimistic outlook on life. Her partner, Joe, on the other hand, is quite neurotic and harm-avoidant. He finds novel situations and experiences threatening, likes spending a lot of time by himself, and often imagines negative outcomes that are unlikely to happen. The personality profiles of Jill and Joe seem fairly incompatible in that each partner potentially “limits” how easily the other partner can satisfy the core motives and goals that underlie his or her personality traits. This, in turn, is likely to influence the quality, stability, and long-term well-being of their relationship. Thus, the ultimate fate of their relationship will hinge partly on how effectively they negotiate their conflicting patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and how well they satisfy each other’s most important needs and goals. This chapter addresses these basic dynamics.

We begin by explaining why and how the personality traits of partners should matter in close relationships. Personality traits are enduring dispositions that reflect an individual’s relatively stable patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors across time and in different situations (Allport, 1937). Although this definition might lead one to assume that an individual experiences and responds to certain events in a specific manner across different relationships and partners, the

personality profile of the *partner* with whom an individual is involved in a relationship should also shape the individual’s relationship experiences and responses, including the course and outcome of the relationship. Accordingly, greater progress in understanding the role of personality in relationships can be made if one examines how the *interplay* of each partner’s traits shapes the interactional patterns that unfold between them, particularly in situations where certain traits ought to be activated.

We then illustrate this interplay using the actor–partner interdependence model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny & Kashy, 2014), which allows one to determine whether and how an individual’s relational experiences and outcomes are affected not only by his or her own personality traits (actor effects) but also by the traits of his/her partner (partner effects) and the combination of both partners’ traits (actor–partner interaction effects); see Figure 12.1. Next, we review a few of the major personality variables that have been studied in the context of close relationships, focusing primarily on romantic ones. While personality researchers have examined *broadband* traits that predict different outcomes in a variety of domains (including relationship and non-relationship contexts), most social psychologists and relationship researchers have focused on more narrowly defined traits. In our brief review, we focus on the “Big Five” personality traits (the most commonly studied broadband traits), adult attachment orientations (which have been linked to more specific relational processes and outcomes; see Mikulincer & Shaver, Chapter 13, this volume), and individual differences in regulatory focus (which have been examined in close relationship contexts more recently). Of course, a number of other personality constructs also shape relationship outcomes. Full coverage of these constructs is beyond the limited scope of this chapter. These constructs include self-esteem (Murray & Holmes, 2011), as well as needs for relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), social approach and avoidance motives (Gable, 2006), and communal and exchange needs (Clark & Mills, 2012).

**Actor Effects:**

a1 = Does Joe's Personality predict his relationship satisfaction (controlling for jill's personality)?  
 a2 = Does Jill's personality predict her relationship satisfaction (controlling for Joe's personality)?

**Partner Effects:**

p1 = Does Joe's Personality predict Jill's relationship satisfaction (controlling for jill's personality)?  
 p2 = Does Jill's personality predict her relationship satisfaction (controlling for Joe's personality)?

**Actor-Partner Interaction Effects:**

c1 = Is the association between Joe's Personality and his relationship satisfaction moderated by Jill's personality? (e.g., is Joe more or less satisfied, depending on Jill's personality?)  
 c2 = Is the association between Jill's Personality and her relationship satisfaction moderated by Joe's personality? (e.g., is Jill more or less satisfied, depending on Joe's personality?)

**Figure 12.1** An actor-partner interdependence model for Joe and Jill's relationship satisfaction

Following this, we briefly review representative relationship studies that have examined *partner effects* and/or *actor-partner interaction effects* associated with enduring traits/dispositions, focusing on the Big Five, attachment orientations, and regulatory focus orientations. We conclude by highlighting promising directions in which the study of personality and relationships might head.

### A DYADIC, CONTEXTUALIZED VIEW OF PERSONALITY IN CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Personality attempts to explain the consistency and continuity in an individual's pattern of thoughts, emotions, and behavior across situations and time (Allport 1937). Certain personality traits, therefore, can and sometimes do predict cross-relationship consistencies and associated outcomes (e.g., Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). For example, since Joe scores high on neuroticism, he should display the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral correlates of neuroticism in his relationship with his current partner, Jill, similar to the way he did in his prior romantic relationship and even earlier ones. If all of these relationships faltered, one might explain these unfortunate outcomes by pointing to the interpersonally challenging aspects of Joe's personality, i.e., his negative attributions and behaviors that might have alienated his partners, such as his tendency to perceive his partners' neutral comments as criticisms, or his hostile behavior in response to such perceptions. Relationships, however, consist of interactions *between* individuals in which partners often *mutually* influence each other

(Kelley, 1983). Consistent with definitions of personality as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment" (Allport, 1937, p. 48), each partner in a relationship becomes a focal point of adjustment for the other. As a result, the personalities of the partners with whom individuals are involved should also play a major role in determining the nature, functioning, course of relationships.

Relationship scientists strive to capture the dynamic and interactive complexities inherent in close relationships. These efforts have culminated in dyadic process models that predict various relationship outcomes, including attraction and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994), perceived responsiveness (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), and trust (Simpson, 2007). Articulating an important early dyadic process model, Reis and Shaver (1988) describe how individuals and their partners experience intimacy during social interactions. According to this model, the starting point is Partner A's expression of information that makes him or her vulnerable (e.g., expressing hurt or sadness) to his/her partner (Partner B). Partner B then interprets the meaning of this disclosure or expression. This interpretation is filtered through Partner B's internal working models (e.g., his or her expectations, motives, and/or needs), which then affects Partner B's response (e.g., to provide comfort and reassurance). This response is then interpreted by Partner A as filtered through his or her internal working models. Depending on Partner B's response and Partner A's interpretation of it, Partner

A should feel more understood, validated, and cared for by Partner B, which should promote feelings of intimacy, especially in Partner A.

A key assumption of this and similar models is that relational experiences are inherently *dyadic processes* that involve the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, inferences, and behaviors of both partners rather than just one partner. Dyadic models can easily accommodate individual differences in personality. For example, each partner's personality characteristics can affect his or her interpretation of the other's response along with his/her own response. Indeed, personality researchers have begun to conceptualize relationship partners as important features of each other's environment (see Simpson & Winterheld, 2012, for a review). Mischel and Shoda's (1995) Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) model, for instance, has been extended to conceptualize a person's immediate situation as consisting largely of his/her partner's behavior. Thus, the stable personality traits of Partner A should influence the interpretation and psychological experience that impacts Partner B's behavior, which should then affect Partner A's response to Partner B. Partner B, in turn, should interpret and experience this response filtered through the schemas associated with his/her own personality traits, triggering specific responses to Partner A's behavior (Zayas, Shoda, & Ayduk, 2002).

Consistent with this reasoning, some relationship researchers have begun to investigate chronic individual differences (personality traits) using similar dyadic frameworks. Lemay and Dudley (2011), for example, have proposed a model of interpersonal insecurity compensation. According to the model, Partner A may possess traits that predispose him or her to feel chronically insecure about his/her partner's (Partner B's) acceptance and regard. These insecurities are detected by Partner B, which affects how Partner B reacts to Partner A. Partner B, for example, might become more cautious around his/her chronically insecure partner (Partner A). To avoid upsetting him/her, Partner B may exaggerate his/her positive thoughts and feelings about Partner A or conceal negative affect from him/her. This, in turn, should increase Partner A's perceptions of being valued and cared for by Partner B, but it may also diminish Partner B's relationship satisfaction over time. While models such as these underscore the importance of examining personality in a dyadic context and they clarify when and how, for example, Joe's personality should affect Jill's behavioral responses, which should then impact both Joe's well-being and Jill's relationship satisfaction, we still know little about how *both* partners' personalities intersect to produce interaction patterns that, over time, contribute to the success or demise of relationships.

### THE ACTOR-PARTNER INTERDEPENDENCE MODEL (APIM)

When researchers test the effects of *both* partners' personality traits on relational experiences and outcomes, they encounter unique methodological and statistical challenges. For instance, when two individuals are involved in a relationship, their scores on most variables correlate to some degree. Ignoring this nonindependence when it exists can increase both Type I and Type II error rates (Kashy & Kenny, 2000). Fortunately, data analytic techniques have been developed that address these problems (See Kenny & Kashy, 2014. See also Kashy, Ackerman, & Donnellan, Chapter 4, this volume; Mashek, Oriña, & Ickes, Chapter 3, this volume).

The most widely used dyadic modeling technique is the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kashy & Kenny, 2000; Kenny, 1996; also see Kashy, Ackerman, & Donnellan, Chapter 4, this volume), which properly models the covariance and statistical dependency that exists when dyad members' scores are more similar than dissimilar than one would expect by chance. The APIM treats the dyad as the unit of analysis and provides tests of not only whether an actor's (i.e., the person providing a response) own attributes predict his or her relationship outcomes (*actor effects*; see Figure 12.1, pathways a1 and a2), but also whether the attributes of the actor's *partner* predict the actor's relationship outcomes (*partner effects*; see Figure 12.1, pathways p1 and p2) while statistically adjusting for within-couple interdependence in the data. For example, an *actor effect* reflects the association between Joe's score on neuroticism and his perceived relationship satisfaction, controlling for his partner's (Jill's) score on neuroticism (see Figure 12.1, pathway a1). A *partner effect* reflects whether and how Joe's perception of relationship satisfaction is shaped by *Jill's* personality; it reveals the association between Jill's score on neuroticism and Joe's rating of relationship satisfaction, controlling for Joe's score on neuroticism (see Figure 12.1, pathway p1). Additionally, the personality attributes of the actor and partner can combine to predict relationship outcomes (*actor-partner interaction effects*; see Figure 12.1, pathways c1 and c2). For example, Joe's score on neuroticism and Jill's score on neuroticism may statistically interact to predict how satisfied Joe is with the relationship (see Figure 12.1, pathway c1). If both of them score high on neuroticism, Joe's relationship satisfaction might be particularly low, but Joe is likely to report higher satisfaction when Jill scores low on neuroticism (even though he scores high).

### DEFINING PERSONALITY

As discussed earlier, personality researchers have primarily examined *broadband* traits that predict different

outcomes in a variety of domains (including both relationship and non-relationship contexts). Most social psychologists and relationship researchers, by comparison, have focused on more narrowly defined traits and dispositions that often have greater predictive accuracy in specific relationship contexts or for specific relationship outcomes. We next discuss traits that represent both of these categories, and then review general empirical findings that link these traits/dispositions with key relationship outcomes.

### The Big Five

A great deal of research on personality and relationships has been informed by the five-factor model of personality (FFM; McCrae & Costa, 1997), which is the most widely used and extensively researched model of personality (see John & Srivastava, 1999). According to this model, the most major, stable individual differences in personality exist along five bipolar dimensions: extraversion (e.g., sociable, assertive, energetic), neuroticism (e.g., easily upset, irritable, self-conscious), conscientiousness (e.g., orderly, dutiful, achievement-striving), openness (e.g., intellectual, imaginative, independence-minded), and agreeableness (e.g., cooperative, modest, good-natured). These five dimensions were identified using a lexical approach (e.g., Allport & Odbert, 1936; Goldberg, 1981). Specifically, individuals were initially asked to rate their friends or themselves on hundreds of words in the English language (e.g., assertive, good-natured, irritable) that describe what people are like. Responses to all of the descriptors were then subjected to factor analyses to identify the core set of traits (dimensions) that define the organization of personality at the broadest level (see Digman, 1990, for a review). These traits were subsequently validated by relating each one to theoretically meaningful external criteria (e.g., neurotic individuals are more likely to worry about impending events).

Numerous studies have linked the Big Five trait dimensions to various personal outcomes (such as happiness, spirituality, health, and longevity), institutional/societal outcomes (such as occupational outcomes, community involvement, volunteerism, and criminality), and interpersonal outcomes (such as satisfaction with and stability of peer, romantic, and family relations; for a review, see Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006). *Neuroticism* is the strongest and most consistent predictor of relationship outcomes. Higher levels of neuroticism forecast greater relationship dissatisfaction, more conflict and/or interpersonal violence, and higher probability of relationship dissolution or divorce (e.g., Barelds, 2005; Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Hellmuth & McNulty, 2008; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Karney & Bradbury, 1997;

Kelly & Conley, 1987; Malouff, Thorsteinsson, Schutte, Bhullar, & Rooke, 2010).

*Agreeableness* is another trait that has been linked to important relationship implications (albeit less consistently so than neuroticism). Various studies have documented that lower levels of agreeableness are associated with more detrimental relational outcomes such as more relationship dissatisfaction and divorce, whereas higher levels of agreeableness have been linked to greater relationship satisfaction (Asendorpf & Wilpers, 1998; Barelds, 2005; Bouchard, Lussier, & Sabourin, 1999; Donnellan et al., 2004; Malouff et al., 2010). While some studies have found these associations for men only (e.g., Kelly & Conley, 1987), others have documented them for both men and women (Bouchard et al., 1999; Kurdek, 1993).

In addition, studies have linked *extraversion* to more favorable relationship outcomes in both men and women (e.g., Barelds, 2005; Bouchard et al., 1999; Malouff et al., 2010), others have found links for men only (Kelly & Conley, 1987; Watson et al., 2000), and still others have not found any associations involving extraversion (Kurdek, 1993). In a well-known longitudinal study of marriage quality and stability, Kelly and Conley (1987) found that even though extraversion predicted greater relationship satisfaction in husbands across time, these men were also eventually more likely to divorce. Inconsistent associations have also been found between *conscientiousness* and relationship outcomes, with some studies reporting positive links with relationship satisfaction (Barelds, 2005; Donnellan et al., 2004; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Malouff et al., 2010), but with others finding nonsignificant associations (e.g., Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000). Finally, *openness* is weakly related to relationship outcomes, with some evidence suggesting that more open men are more satisfied with their relationships (Bouchard et al., 1999) and more open individuals have less negative observer-rated interactions (Donnellan, 2004), but with other studies reporting nonsignificant associations (Kurdek, 1993; Malouff et al., 2010).

In sum, even though the FFM is a useful predictive framework in the interpersonal domain, associations between Big Five traits and relationship outcomes are less consistent than those between the Big Five and other outcomes (e.g., subjective well-being). One reason for these inconsistencies may be that studies on the Big Five and relationship-relevant outcomes have rarely considered the personality of individuals' partners, which may also influence these outcomes. In addition, because they are global measures of personality, the Big Five traits may be better predictors of broader relational outcomes that are shaped by a variety of factors across different types of contexts (Ozer & Benet-Martinez, 2006) rather than of psychological functioning in specific relationships.



The latter may be more accurately predicted and explained by more narrowly defined personality constructs.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, many personality constructs can shape relationship processes and outcomes. We focus on attachment orientations (attachment anxiety and avoidance) and regulatory focus orientations (promotion focus and prevention focus) for several reasons. First, although associations between certain Big Five traits and both attachment orientations (e.g., Shaver & Brennan, 1992; Nofle & Shaver, 2006) and regulatory focus orientations (e.g., Grant & Higgins, 2003) do exist, and although Big Five traits and narrow dispositions do at times operate together in affecting relationship outcomes (Winterheld & Chung, 2016), attachment and regulatory focus orientations most likely develop independently of the Big Five and should, therefore, shape relationship processes and outcomes in unique ways. Indeed, both of these sets of traits have incremental predictive validity beyond the Big Five (e.g., Nofle & Shaver, 2006), meaning that, while many personality traits can be mapped onto the Big Five, one cannot derive all individual differences from the Big Five alone (Funder, 2001). Moreover, both attachment theory and regulatory focus theory have strong, unique explanatory power. They not only describe the socio-developmental origins of their respective personality constructs; they also specify the fundamental needs, motives, and goals that underlie these individual differences along with the specific responses that individuals should have and the strategies they should use in order to attain these important needs and goals. In so doing, these theories shed light on the processes and mechanisms that link specific traits to specific outcomes, i.e., explain why personality yields certain outcomes in relationships. As a result, these theories allow researchers to derive and test relatively clear hypotheses about *when* (in which situations), *why*, and *how* individuals ought to respond in certain ways to both their partners and events in their relationships, and they provide a coherent conceptual framework within which to interpret the results that emerge.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), for example, has its origins in psychodynamic and evolutionary approaches (Cassidy & Shaver, 2016; Simpson & Belsky, 2016). The theory, which strives to explain social and personality development across the lifespan, explains systematic patterns of thinking about and responding to significant others depending on a person's attachment orientation. The theory also specifies the unique situational contexts that ought to be most relevant to the concerns of people who have different attachment orientations and how these orientations, and the working models (schemas) that underlie them, should guide their thoughts, emotions, and behavior in given situations. Similarly, regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) explains how two fundamental needs for growth/nurturance and safety/security, develop into promotion orientations and prevention orientations, respectively. Moreover, the

theory specifies the perceptual sensitivities and behavioral strategies associated with each orientation that ought to facilitate the attainment of needs for growth and security in different situational contexts.

### Attachment Orientations

According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980), the perceived quality of early child-caregiver interactions gives rise to internal working models (cognitive representations) of relationships (see Mikulincer & Shaver, Chapter 13, this volume). Over time, working models influence the way in which individuals respond in close relationships as manifested in relatively stable modes of thought, emotion, and behavior known as attachment orientations (styles). Adult attachment orientations are assessed on two fairly independent dimensions: avoidance and anxiety (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996). An individual's location within the two-dimensional space defined by these two dimensions predicts the course, quality, and stability of his/her romantic relationships, and can help clarify the cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes through which these outcomes occur.

Following a history of perceived rejection and neglect, people who score high on attachment *avoidance* doubt others' ability or willingness to be responsive to their attachment needs, are uncomfortable with closeness and self-disclosure, and maintain psychological distance to retain autonomy and control. Given a history of perceived inconsistent or unpredictable care, people who score high on attachment *anxiety* worry excessively about abandonment, crave reassurance, and strive to maintain high levels of closeness in their relationships. Based on a history of perceived consistent and predictable care, people who score low on both avoidance and anxiety are considered *secure attached*. These individuals trust that others will be caring and responsive when needed, enjoy providing and receiving support from their partners in times of need, and enjoy developing emotional closeness without craving it excessively.

In terms of relationship experiences and outcomes, compared to securely attached people, insecure individuals (e.g., those who score high in anxiety and/or avoidance) report greater loneliness and social isolation, less relationship satisfaction, greater conflict, and higher break-up rates (see Feeney, 2016, for a review). Several studies have also linked attachment orientations to assorted relationship-relevant perceptions and behaviors. For example, insecurely attached people tend to view their partners and relationships more negatively (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2004) and they engage in more destructive relationship behaviors (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). Securely attached people, in contrast, appraise their partners and relationships more positively (e.g., Collins, 1996), are more likely to seek support when it is needed (e.g., Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992), and

provide more effective support to their partners (see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007, for a review).

One central tenet of attachment theory is that the perceptual, affective, and behavioral responses associated with different attachment orientations should be activated by and amplified under specific conditions (Bowlby, 1973; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Such conditions include internal distress (e.g., hunger, pain, illness), threatening environmental events (e.g., dangerous or extremely challenging situations), and relationship distress (e.g., conflict or rejection by a significant other) (see Simpson & Rholes, 1994). When these conditions are present, the accessibility of working models increases, which then elicits the specific responses that people who possess certain attachment orientations use to reduce their level of distress. When these conditions are not present, however, attachment orientations exert less influence on relationship-relevant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For example, when situations are not relationship-threatening or not pertinent to attachment concerns, highly avoidant people can be receptive to support from their partners and do *not* withdraw from them, and highly anxious person do *not* monitor the whereabouts of their partners or ruminate about possible abandonment.

### Regulatory Focus Orientations

Another set of individual differences that has implications for processes and outcomes in close relationships involves motivational concerns that govern how people represent and pursue their goals, both within relationships and outside of them. Building on earlier distinctions between needs for growth/development and safety/protection (e.g., Maslow, 1955), regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 1997) describes how these two fundamental needs give rise to different self-regulatory orientations. According to this theory, there are two coexisting yet relatively independent self-regulatory orientations: (1) a *promotion focus*, which is concerned with advancement through the pursuit of hopes and aspirations (i.e., goals one *hopes* to achieve), and (b) a *prevention focus*, which is concerned with security through the fulfillment of duties and obligations (i.e., goals one *must* achieve).

Similar to attachment orientations, individual differences in regulatory focus develop in early social environments. In contrast to attachment orientations, however, it is not the quality and consistency of care that children receive, but the specific focus of care (e.g., whether parenting practices encourage the pursuit of aspirations versus duties and obligations) that instills chronic concerns with promotion or prevention (Higgins & Silberman, 1998; Manian, Papadakis, Strauman, & Essex, 2006). A range of psychological processes and outcomes is associated with promotion and prevention orientations (see Molden, Lee, & Higgins, 2008, for a review). Predominantly promotion-focused people, for example, are concerned with autonomy needs (Lee Aaker, & Gardner, 2000), focus on

the presence and absence of positive events (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). Predominantly prevention-focused people, in contrast, are concerned with interdependence needs (Lee et al., 2000), focus on the presence and absence of negative outcomes (Higgins & Tykocinski, 1992), prefer vigilant avoidance strategies to maintain security, and enact a select few proven strategies to attain their goals, even if doing so increases the risk of missing out on good opportunities (Crowe & Higgins, 1997).

Although the application of regulatory focus theory to relationships is relatively recent, an emerging body of research has revealed how the perceptual sensitivities and strategic preferences associated with promotion and prevention orientations shape processes and outcomes in close relationships (see Molden & Winterheld, 2013, for a review). Promotion and prevention concerns orient people both perceptually and behaviorally to features of their relationships in ways that facilitate the attainment of their needs for growth/advancement or security (e.g., Winterheld & Simpson, 2011). And the extent to which relationship partners support the fulfillment of these needs also affects how promotion-focused and prevention-focused people feel about their relationship. For example, promotion-focused people evaluate their relationships more favorably when they believe their autonomy needs are supported, whereas those who are prevention-focused judge theirs more positively when they perceive greater support for relatedness needs (Hui, Molden, & Finkel, 2013). The promotion and prevention concerns that people bring into interactions with their romantic partners also shape the way in which they respond to and perceive one another during these interactions. Studies have documented the ways in which each regulatory focus orientation predicts how partners respond in different situations, such as when trying to resolve a conflict (Ayduk, May, Downey, & Higgins, 2003; Winterheld & Simpson, 2011) or when pursuing goals external to the relationship (e.g., career goals; Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012; Winterheld & Simpson, 2016). For example, consistent with their eager strategies of goal pursuit, highly promotion-focused people perceive greater support from their partners and display more creative problem-solving during observed conflict resolutions with their partners. In contrast, consistent with their vigilant goal-pursuit strategies, highly prevention-focused people perceive more withdrawal/distancing behaviors and less support from their partners during conflict, and try to resolve it by discussing concrete details that caused and contributed to it (Winterheld & Simpson, 2011).

Promotion and prevention orientations also shape processes within relationships when partners pursue goals outside of it (e.g., work or academic goals). Consistent with their preference for broad, inclusive goal-pursuit



strategies, highly promotion-focused people are likely to view their social environment as an opportunity for advancing their personal agendas. Accordingly, when their most valued goals are challenging to achieve, highly promotion-focused people approach their partners more and perceive more support from their partners for these goals (Winterheld & Simpson, 2016). Highly prevention-focused people, on the other hand, should be more sensitive to the potential interpersonal costs of their personal goal pursuits. Consistent with their greater interdependence needs, they should also be less inclined to capitalize on their relationships for advancement of their autonomous agendas. As expected, highly prevention-focused people do approach their partners less for support in these contexts (Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012; see also Komissarouk & Nadler, 2014), and perceptions of partner responsiveness to their valued goals reassure highly prevention-focused people that these goals are not disruptive to the relationship (Winterheld & Simpson, 2016).

In summary, research on regulatory focus in close relationship is a relatively new endeavor, so current findings are tentative and more likely to be revised and refined by future research. However, because close relationships are vital sources of goal support for most people, treating regulatory focus orientations as key dispositions that partners bring into everyday goal-support interactions ought to provide important, novel insights into the specific interpersonal processes that create and maintain closeness and emotional intimacy between partners.

## REVIEW OF RESEARCH

We now review the relatively small number of studies that have properly tested and found evidence for either partner effects or actor by partner interaction effects associated with the personality dispositions reviewed earlier (partners' scores on one of the Big Five traits, attachment orientations, or promotion or prevention orientations).

### The Big Five

As discussed earlier, studies have documented that neuroticism is a strong and consistent predictor of unfavorable relationship outcomes. The vast majority of this research has examined actor effects, that is, the effects that an individual's level of neuroticism has on his/her own relationship outcomes. This connection has been explained through both perceptual and behavioral processes, in that highly neurotic individuals tend to behave in a more hostile manner toward their partners and also perceive their partners as more antagonistic and negative than their partners actually appear to be (McNulty, 2008). Through such dysfunctional behavioral and cognitive processes, highly neurotic individuals also affect their partners' relationship experiences. Indeed, many studies have confirmed that individuals' relationship outcomes are often less favorable when their *partners* are more neurotic.

For instance, individuals involved in relationships with highly neurotic partners usually report less marital satisfaction (Barelds, 2005; Bouchard et al., 1999; Donnellan et al., 2004; Holland & Roisman, 2008; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004; Robins, et al., 2002) and lower sexual satisfaction (Fisher & McNulty, 2008). Furthermore, behavioral observation research has revealed that each partner's neuroticism positively predicts engaging in observer-rated demand-withdrawal (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000), a communication pattern that is particularly detrimental to relationship quality and stability (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995).

Agreeableness is another trait that has important relationship implications. Highly agreeable individuals typically report more favorable relationship outcomes and experiences, whereas less agreeable people experience greater relationship dissatisfaction. These links also have been explained through both perceptual and behavioral processes. For example, highly agreeable individuals often have more optimistic perceptions of, and perceive greater support from, close others (Branje, Van Lieshout, & Van Aken, 2005; Swickert, Hittner, & Foster, 2010). They also behave more constructively during relationship conflicts and are less likely to display demand-withdrawal patterns (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2000; Donnellan et al., 2004; Holland & Roisman, 2008). The interpersonal processes associated with individuals' agreeableness should also influence their partners' outcomes. Consistent with this, studies have confirmed that individuals involved with less agreeable partners tend to report lower relationship satisfaction, and vice versa (e.g., Bouchard et al., 1999; Donnellan, 2004; Watson et al., 2000).

Very few studies have examined how individuals' Big Five traits *interact* with their partners' traits to forecast outcomes in romantic relationships (e.g., Roberts, Smith, Jackson, & Edmonds, 2009; Solomon & Jackson, 2014a). However, certain actor trait by partner trait pairings ought to be associated with especially negative relationship functioning and outcomes. For example, given that neuroticism and agreeableness both have important effects on relationships, highly neurotic individuals who are romantically involved with highly disagreeable individuals should be especially vulnerable to poorer relationship functioning and deleterious outcomes. Indirect support for this hypothesis comes from a study of the transition to parenthood, a life event that most people find highly stressful. Marshall, Simpson, and Rholes (2015) measured the personalities of both partners in a sample of first-time expecting parents and then reassessed them across the first two years of the transition period. Highly neurotic actors married to highly disagreeable partners reported higher levels of depressive symptoms across the entire transition. Depressive symptoms were even worse when dysfunctional problem-solving communication and aggression existed in the relationship before childbirth, suggesting that these behavior patterns might be partially responsible for initiating or sustaining depressive

symptoms in highly neurotic individuals paired with highly disagreeable partners.

Extraversion has been linked to mostly favorable relationship outcomes and interpersonal processes, but some negative ones as well (e.g., Kelly & Conley, 1987). For instance, extraversion predicts more positive emotional tone during couple conversations (Holland & Roisman, 2008) and greater provision and perceptions of support from partners (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997; Swickert et al., 2010). Perhaps not surprisingly then, studies testing for partner extraversion effects have found that individuals involved with highly extraverted partners report higher levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Barelds, 2005; Watson et al., 2000).

Positive relations have also been documented between individuals' relationship satisfaction and their partners' conscientiousness, but these connections are frequently moderated by relationship stage. Watson et al. (2000), for example, found positive ties between partner conscientiousness and relationship satisfaction in marriages, but found that partner conscientiousness is unrelated to satisfaction in dating couples. Conversely, Holland and Roisman (2008) found that partner conscientiousness predicts relationship quality for dating and engaged couples, but not for married couples. Although partners' level of conscientiousness is not a consistent predictor of how individuals feel about their relationships, researchers have documented beneficial effects of partners' conscientiousness in non-relational contexts. For example, in a study of older couples (age fifty and older), Roberts et al. (2009) found that higher conscientiousness in husbands predicts better health and physical functioning in wives, controlling for wives' levels of conscientiousness. Moreover, for both men and women, having a more conscientious partner predicts more favorable work-related and occupational outcomes (Solomon & Jackson, 2014b).

### Attachment

While attachment theory itself does not specify dyadic predictions, it proposes that attachment relationships can be viewed as "goal-corrected partnerships" in which partners adjust to the goals and needs of each other (Bowlby, 1988). To date, the vast majority of adult attachment research has focused on actor effects, that is, how an individual's attachment orientation shapes his/her own relational experiences and outcomes. However, the number of studies testing partner effects (i.e., how one partner's attachment orientation affects the other partner's experiences and outcomes) and actor by partner interaction effects (i.e., how the combination of both partners' attachment orientations predicts relational experiences and outcomes) is growing. For example, recent studies have revealed that individuals involved with highly avoidant or highly anxious partners tend to experience lower relationship satisfaction (Molero, Shaver, Ferrer, Cuadrado, & Alosno-Arbiol, 2011), those involved with

highly avoidant partners report less sexual satisfaction in their marriages (Butzer and Campbell, 2008), and individuals who have highly anxious partners perceive interactions with them as more negative and lower in intimacy and disclosure (Bradford, Feeney, & Campbell, 2002).

With respect to interaction effects, because highly avoidant and highly anxious individuals have conflicting relationship goals, needs, and emotion regulatory preferences, highly avoidant/highly anxious pairings ought to be associated with particularly negative relationship functioning and outcomes. Indeed, behavioral observation research has confirmed that couples consisting of one highly anxious partner and one highly avoidant partner tend to have more negative interactions during capitalization discussions in which one partner tries to share good news with the other partner (Shallcross, Howland, Simpson, & Frazier, 2011). Furthermore, newlywed couples consisting of a highly anxious wife and a highly avoidant husband show greater physiological stress reactivity (i.e., cortisol increases) while anticipating conflict discussions and poorly coordinated support behaviors, with anxious wives misperceiving their avoidant husbands' distress, and with avoidant husbands not engaging in effective support-seeking (Beck, Pietromonaco, DeBuse, Powers, & Sayer, 2013). Moreover, highly anxious individuals report greater negative emotion expressivity when involved with more secure (less anxious) partners, but both highly anxious and highly avoidant individuals report greater emotion suppression when involved with highly avoidant partners (Winterheld, 2016a). These findings suggest that greater avoidance in one partner "pulls" for greater expressive suppression in the other partner, particularly if the second partner is also insecurely attached. These dyadic patterns of mutual suppression are likely to erode relationship satisfaction over time.

### Regulatory Focus

As discussed earlier, an emerging body of research has begun to document actor effects of promotion and prevention orientations on relationship processes and outcomes that are motivationally relevant to each orientation. Very few studies have examined regulatory focus partner effects, but individuals' relationship experiences should also be affected by the motivational concerns their partners have. Indeed, in a behavioral observation study in which couples discussed different types of goals (Winterheld & Simpson, 2016), individuals perceived greater responsive support from partners who were highly prevention-focused. Even though highly prevention-focused people tend to be less likely to directly request support for themselves, they may be effective at maintaining relationships by providing reliable support to their partners, which fits with their responsibility concerns.

Bohns et al. (2013) found that couples with one highly promotion-focused and one prevention-focused partner tend to experience greater relationship well-being, but

only under conditions of high goal coordination. This favorable relationship outcome of complementary regulatory focus pairings did not occur when couples disagreed about which goals to pursue jointly. Finally, Winterheld (2016b) documented that highly promotion-focused individuals tend to be more supportive of their partners' goals when their partners are more prevention-focused, but they are more supportive primarily when their partners' goals are congruent with their *own* concerns (i.e., when their prevention-focused partners pursue aspirations rather than duties or obligations).

### FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

As this cursory review of the literature indicates, surprisingly little research has investigated partner effects or actor by partner interaction effects associated with major personality traits or dispositions that might affect relationship quality or longevity. One reason for this is that most theories are individual-focused, and they rarely derive partner or actor by partner predictions. A second reason is that statistical methods capable of modeling the interdependence that naturally exists between relationship partners have been in existence and used for only about twenty years.

There is a pressing need for more dyadic theorizing with respect to each of the major theories discussed in this chapter. Important guiding questions for future research include: (1) What kinds of partner trait effects or actor trait by partner trait interaction effects predict more versus less satisfaction and/or stability in romantic relationships? For example, with what kinds of partners might highly neurotic individuals have more constructive interactions that might stabilize their relationships over time? (2) In what kinds of situations, or during what kinds of life events or transitions, are certain partner trait effects or actor trait by partner trait interaction effects most likely to emerge? For example, McNulty and Russell (2010) found that partners' negative behaviors (such as blaming) in response to minor problems predict declines in relationship satisfaction, but the same negative behaviors also predict more stable satisfaction when displayed in response to severe problems. Might highly agreeable people affect their relationships (or partners) negatively by refraining from confronting their partners during certain events or in certain situations? (3) What sorts of relationship perceptions and behaviors serve as the proximal mechanisms that generate positive or negative relationship outcomes?

In conclusion, despite the fact that the ultimate success of close relationships depends in part on the enduring personality traits and dispositions that each partner brings to the relationship, surprisingly little research has examined this set of issues. This represents a large theoretical and empirical gap in our understanding of major personality traits as well as key relationship processes and outcomes. We hope that this chapter will spawn more interest

at the fascinating intersection between personality and close relationships.

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