

the topic, originating as it does from several different research contexts. They focus on those relationships at work that 'transcend the task roles specified by the organisation . . . those relationships which might, in some sense, be termed "romantic"'.¹

It is clear from the Dillard and Miller chapter that this new area of research needs integration with other work on relationships for, as the authors note, 'romantic relationships at work are no less complex and meaningful than those in other settings'. It is, perhaps, the fact that they occur in public but are often disguised that makes them so intriguing, and also renders them the object of organizational interference both on the level of the abstract 'corporate management' and at the more mundane level of interaction with other colleagues in the organization.

The final chapter, by George McCall, deals with 'The Organizational Life Cycle of Relationships'. The main theme of McCall's inspiring and cogent representation of a sociology of the dyad is the belief that a dyadic relationship is a species of social organization, which, like other social organizations, has a life over and above the two partners in it. From this it follows that the dyad will and does organize itself in ways comparable to those of other organizations, with role differentiation, objectified forms, a sense of collectivity, and creation of a shared culture.

In this framework, McCall offers an interpretation of the conduct of relationship partners that take us far beyond the usual intrapsychic explanations offered by social psychologists and reviews different models of the development and decline of relationships in terms of the 'organizational life cycle'. He concludes that an organismic analogy for dyads would help us to reorient our approach to relationship development, while a move away 'from "internal locus of control" to a greater recognition of vital environmental influences—especially the variety of interorganizational relationships' can only be good for the field. As such, his chapter provides a neat bridge between this section and the next on community and clinical issues.

Taken as a whole Section Four emphasizes the role of time and process in relationships along with the negotiative interplay of individual cognitions and behaviours in the broader context of the social environment. As such, it reifies the dramatic new direction for the field and points our empirically itchy feet along the most productive road for our continuing long journey of research development.

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20

Intimacy as an Interpersonal Process

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we propose a model of the intimacy process. The process begins when one person expresses personally revealing feelings or information to another. It continues when the listener responds supportively and empathically. For an interaction to become intimate, the discloser must feel understood, validated, and cared for.

'Intimacy' and 'intimate'—from the Latin words *intimus* (innermost) and *intimare* (to make the innermost known) (Partridge, 1966)—are elusive terms for social scientists. They can be used to refer to feelings, to verbal and nonverbal communication processes, to behaviors, to people's arrangements in space, to personality traits, to sexual activities, and to kinds of long-term relationships. What, if anything, do these phenomena have in common? Do all of them relate in some way to making one's innermost qualities known?

In a recent overview of intimacy research entitled 'Intimacy as the proverbial elephant', Acitelli and Duck (1987) observe that 'It is a necessary and valuable part of the research enterprise that some researchers must feel some parts of the creature whilst others probe other areas. We will . . . remain blind only if we fail to relate the different reports to one another or if we see them as exclusive or competitive rather than compatible or complementary' (pp. 306–307). Employing the same metaphor in an analysis of research on communication in intimate relationships, Montgomery (1984b) observed that 'at this point in our progress toward understanding intimates' communication, we are

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probably fortunate to have a variety of perspectives which contribute unique information. However, seeing the proverbial elephant in different ways does not negate any one way. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding comes with the ultimate integration of viewpoints, however diverse' (p. 322). Our goal in the present chapter is to begin to assemble the intimacy elephant, so to speak, by juxtaposing and interweaving elements from a variety of theoretical and empirical perspectives. It is too early, no doubt, to create a complete and lifelike creature from the parts that have been identified so far. But it may not be too early to attempt a useful and reliable sketch, a kind of elephant map that can be used to guide future exploration. At the center of this map, we maintain, is a core social psychological process with distinct communicative and emotional features.

The chapter includes four major sections. First, we provide a highly selective overview of theories, concepts, and approaches that we believe are essential for construction of a model of intimacy, given that intimacy is to be conceptualized as an interpersonal, transactional *process*. As Duck and Sants (1983) have noted, the major problem with previous research and theorizing about personal relationships is that phenomena such as attraction and intimacy are treated as 'timeless states and rootless events' rather than dynamic processes affected by the participants' goals and relationship history. As we intend to show, the different everyday and social scientific meanings of the term 'intimacy' make sense when viewed in relation to a process of emotional communication. It is this process, and not a static condition, that marks interactions as intimate.

In the second section of the chapter we present a model of the intimacy process and attempt to clarify its components and stages. This section is, in effect, our sketch of the intimacy elephant, our integration of existing knowledge and speculation. Third, having examined intimacy as an interactive process, we consider how intimate interactions are situated within the context of ongoing relationships. We draw a distinction between intimate interactions and intimate relationships. Finally, we consider why intimacy matters, why it has become a focus of both professional and popular concern, and why learning more about it may prove useful.

THEORY AND RESEARCH: A SELECTIVE REVIEW

Our model will be assembled from existing theories, research findings, and personal observations. The goal is not to provide an exhaustive summary or review of existing approaches but rather to select important and relevant components that fit together to form a coherent model. We consider a broad range of approaches: clinical, communicational, developmental, personological, and social. Each offers unique insights and strengths, and all but the clinical approach are based on the study of naturally occurring relationships. Clinically based theories, we should note at the outset, are largely founded on therapeutic relationships which, though atypical because of their relative one-sidedness, special aims, and narrow range of activity (Duck, 1977), contain a fairly pure form of one important part of the intimacy process: the client's self-revelation

in the presence of a sympathetic and attentive listener. This component of the process is easily obscured by other activities and motives in naturally occurring and more diversified relationships.

We assume that researchers and theorists who use the intimacy concept are talking about separate facets of a single complex process, and that because of different intellectual and clinical goals, different theoretical traditions, different methods, different target age groups, and different languages, the central process has remained somewhat concealed. The repeatedly occurring concepts and issues include: approach and avoidance motives related to intimacy, verbal and nonverbal disclosure of self-relevant information and feelings that in other kinds of interaction remain private or hidden, attentiveness and responsiveness on the part of an interaction partner (spouse, friend, therapist), validation of important aspects of one or both interaction partners' self-concepts or identities, and feelings of being understood, cared for, and approved of. In the following subsections we indicate how these components of the intimacy process, each central to the model we propose, are derivable from existing theories and research. Once the necessary elements have been gathered together, we will be ready to present our model.

Psychodynamic Building Blocks

Harry Stack Sullivan. From Sullivan (1953) we borrow two observations. (1) The need for intimacy emerges between childhood and adolescence, when one's closest peer relationships are likely to be with same-sex partners. According to Sullivan, 'Intimacy is that type of situation involving two people which permits validation of all components of personal worth' (p. 246). Intimacy is a collaboration in which both partners reveal themselves, and seek and express validation of each other's attributes and world views. Close friends (or 'chums') generally resemble each other, so collaboration in establishing shared understandings and a mutual sense of worth and security is relatively straightforward. (2) The onset of puberty induces a wish to form a comparable bond with a member of the opposite sex, motivated by 'lustful needs'. For Sullivan, however, intimacy and lust are independent factors which may combine or become opposed in complex ways. Presaging current analyses of sex differences in intimacy (e.g. Rubin, 1983), he suggests that the different socialization and cultural experiences of females and males leave the two sexes somewhat ill-prepared to establish intimate (i.e. mutually validating) relationships with each other.

Research supports Sullivan's claim that intimacy becomes salient during preadolescence, primarily within the context of same-sex friendships. At that point in development, children's descriptions of friendship begin to emphasize sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings (e.g. Berndt, 1981; Buhrmester and Furman, 1987; Furman and Bierman, 1984). Moreover, sophisticated perspective-taking, a prerequisite for adult-like empathy and validation, becomes an important component of social skill during this period (Selman, 1980). Other research, involving adults, has demonstrated the importance of validation as a goal for social interaction. For example, Goethals (1986; Goethals and Darley,

1977) suggested that self-validation is a major motive for social comparison processes, and Gottman (1979) has shown that an important difference between distressed and nondistressed married couples is that the latter exhibit mutual validation to a greater extent in their problem-focused communications.

Erik Erikson. Erikson (1950, 1968), in an effort to conceptualize psychosocial development across the lifespan, went beyond Sullivan while continuing to rely on compatible concepts. Erikson used the term intimacy primarily to describe a quality of mature adult heterosexual relationships. He defined intimacy as a counterpointing and fusing of identities, and argued that it becomes a major developmental issue early in adulthood, after the establishment of a secure identity and before the attainment of 'generativity'. Just as Sullivan noted that same-sex validation of beliefs and feelings is impossible before preadolescence, Erikson observed that genuine commitment to an adult romantic relationship (which to him meant heterosexual marriage) requires the existence of relatively stable and self-acknowledged identities. Identities are what adult lovers share, compare, and ultimately intertwine. Sexuality, an important component of adult intimacy, ideally involves a coordinated mutuality of pleasure between people who know and care deeply about each other, symbolized for Erikson by mutual and satisfying orgasm.

Erikson's portrayal of intimacy as a form of heterosexual relatedness attained only in adulthood conflicts, at first glance, with Sullivan's focus on same-sex friendship during preadolescence. The conflict is more apparent than real for two reasons. First, the earlier form of intimacy that Sullivan described is important to the construction of a stable self-concept. His notion of self is similar to what Erikson called identity, a prerequisite to adult intimacy, so Sullivan was writing about a process by which same-sex chums contribute to identity development. Second, Erikson agreed with Sullivan that same-sex friends are naturally better suited than opposite-sex friends to share understandings and provide validation, owing to their common experiences. However, because a combination of sexuality with trust and commitment ultimately leads to the most satisfying form of relationship according to both Sullivan and Erikson, and because parenthood is an essential part of later stages of development, Erikson maintained that true intimacy is best exemplified by committed heterosexual relationships.

Research based on interviews and questionnaires generally supports Erikson's claim that identity precedes intimacy, although this pattern is typically more common for men than women (Orlofsky, 1987). By and large, existing studies contrast intimacy (i.e. establishment of a committed, integrated heterosexual relationship) with various forms of its absence: for example, preintimacy (involved but not yet committed), stereotyped (uncommitted and superficially involved), pseudointimacy (committed to a superficial relationship), and isolation (Tesch and Whitbourne, 1982). Unfortunately, few studies in this relatively new research area have focused on the emotional and communicative processes involved in comparing identities, establishing sexual mutuality, becoming committed, and so forth; instead, intimacy is treated as a state to be

attained. We know relatively little about the dynamics of the intimacy process pointed to by Erikson.

Carl Rogers. From Rogers (1961) we derive an emphasis on the role of unconditional positive regard in fostering open communication, intimacy, lowered defensiveness, and enhanced self-esteem. The intimate partners that Rogers originally had in mind were patients and psychotherapists, and parents and children, but he later extended his thinking to the realms of marriage (Rogers, 1972) and encounter groups (Rogers, 1970), arguing that similar processes are evident in all close relationships. According to Rogers, unconditional positive regard (empathic, nonjudgemental, supportive listening) encourages a person to become more self-accepting and better integrated, which in turn facilitates interpersonal openness and trust. Rogers' ideas fit well with Sullivan's, in that both see validation as a major component of intimacy.

Research from both therapy and nontherapy situations supports Rogers' assertions. For example, he contended that 'organismic experiencing' (authentic emotional expression and acceptance of feelings) encouraged by a therapist's sympathetic listening is at the heart of constructive personal change, and this has been documented in numerous studies (see summaries in Greenberg and Safran, 1987, and Orlinsky and Howard, 1975). One consequence of increased security and self-acceptance is reduction in the feelings of vulnerability and fear of exploitation that can preclude or interfere with intimacy (Hatfield, 1984; Kelvin, 1977). Turning to laboratory findings: being liked is one of the strongest elicitors of liking (Berscheid, 1985b); it encourages self-disclosure, whereas even mild social rejection inhibits disclosure (Taylor, Altman and Sorrentino, 1969); and listener responsiveness leads to increased liking for the listener and a sense that the speaker and listener have become better acquainted (Davis and Perkowski, 1979).

Attachment and object relations theories. Many psychodynamic theorists begin their analysis of intimacy with the mother-infant relationship. Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory, for example, focuses on the infant's need for security, which is satisfied by proximity to a reliable and responsive caregiver. He claims that the infant's sense of security is a prerequisite for normal curiosity and sociability with peers. Ainsworth's empirical extensions of Bowlby's ideas (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978; see Bretherton, 1985, for a recent review) reveal connections between specific styles of parenting and specific patterns of security and insecurity in young children. Recently, attachment researchers have extended these ideas to adult relationships (e.g. Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Levitz-Jones and Orlofsky, 1985; Main, Kaplan and Cassidy, 1985; Ricks, 1985).

Bowlby contends that cross-age continuity in attachment style is largely due to cognitive structures (comprising expectations, beliefs, and defenses) which he called 'inner working models' of self and relationship partners. This is similar to object relations theorists' notion that social cognition involves representations of self and others, referred to somewhat awkwardly as 'objects', 'part objects', etc., following the terminology of Freud's instinct theory (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983; Winnicott, 1965). Unfortunately, the working-models construct is currently defined so vaguely that different researchers employ rather different

measures of it (e.g. Hazan and Shaver, 1987; Main, Kaplan and Cassidy, 1985; see critical analysis by Dunn, this volume). Hazan and Shaver interpret working models as beliefs about self and relationship partners that can be measured by self-report questionnaires; in contrast, Main *et al.* assess defensiveness and information-processing distortions evident in transcripts of clinical interviews. In addition, there is still no longitudinal study that provides direct evidence for continuity of attachment style between early childhood and adolescence or adulthood. The longest longitudinal studies span only the period from infancy to middle childhood (e.g. Main, Kaplan and Cassidy, 1985; Sroufe, 1987). Attachment-theoretic studies of adults use retrospective questioning about parent-child relationship history, and this method is obviously problematic.

Despite such drawbacks, existing studies do suggest that concepts from Bowlby's theory, designed originally to characterize infant-caregiver relationships, apply meaningfully to adult intimate relationships and to the emotions inherent in them—for example falling in love and grieving for a lost partner (Parkes and Weiss, 1983; Shaver, Hazan and Bradshaw, 1988). For present purposes it is of interest that the process Bowlby delineated, involving a young child's security (or insecurity) produced in relationships with caregivers who are (or are not) emotionally available, sensitive, and responsive, is compatible in spirit with the theories and observations of Sullivan and Rogers, who used concepts such as validation, sensitive listening, and positive regard. This similarity suggests that central components of intimacy appear, perhaps in somewhat different forms, across the lifespan.

Building Blocks from Communication and Exchange Research

Self-disclosure. Sidney Jourard's writings were seminal in calling attention to the topic of self-disclosure and in introducing an objective, easily administered, and face-valid measure of disclosure (Jourard, 1964, 1971; Jourard and Lasakow, 1958). His main contention, supported by much subsequent research, was that disclosure of inner feelings and experiences to another person fosters liking, caring, and trust, thereby facilitating the deepening of close relationships (see Chelune, Robinson and Kommor, 1984; Cozby, 1973; and Lvinger and Snoek, 1972, for reviews). Although most self-disclosure theories acknowledge that the act of revealing information about oneself is only one aspect of intimate communication, the lion's share of empirical studies concern the exchange of self-relevant facts, in part, no doubt, because of the simplicity and demonstrated theoretical and predictive utility of existing questionnaires, all of which focus on the depth, interpersonal riskiness, or normative privacy of facts revealed about oneself (e.g. Chelune, 1976; Jourard, 1964; Taylor and Altman, 1966).

As Montgomery (1981b) notes, the 'tacit assumption in the literature . . . that "intimacy" as applied to topics corresponds to "intimacy" as applied to relationships' (p. 29) is too simple. A growing number of studies demonstrate that self-disclosure is a complex multidimensional process characterized by numerous features over and above the simple act of revealing personal facts. For example, Morton (1978) showed that evaluative self-disclosure (revealing

personal feelings about various life topics) was more closely associated than descriptive self-disclosure (revealing self-relevant facts) with relationship closeness. More recently, Montgomery (1981b, 1984b) proposed a comprehensive model of open communication which includes such style components as verbal immediacy (e.g. 'I' statements, speaking in the active voice, referring to the here-and-now, and omitting probability qualifiers), relationship relevance, emotional openness, and receptive openness (willingness to receive others' open communication), in addition to the more traditional category of topic intimacy. Montgomery's (1984a) research indicates that whereas observers base their judgements of openness almost equally on content and style, communicators themselves rely primarily on style. In our process model, therefore, we will consider both topical and stylistic components of intimacy.

Nonverbal communication. A noteworthy feature of Montgomery's work is that it portends an integration of verbal and nonverbal approaches to the assessment of intimacy. Until now, the literatures on self-disclosure and nonverbal communication have remained largely distinct despite the fact that both include the term 'intimacy' and contain frequent allusions to each other. Nonverbal communication researchers describe as intimate a variety of behaviors that indicate heightened involvement in interactions (e.g. eye contact, proximity, touch; Argyle and Dean, 1965). These factors are dynamically inter-related; if other parameters remain unchanged, increased eye contact tends to heighten the perceived intimacy of an interaction, for example. If the current degree of involvement is uncomfortable, either interactant may reduce intimacy in several ways—for example by averting gaze, increasing physical distance, shifting body orientation, or steering clear of intimate topics.

Nevertheless, nonverbal behaviors, like verbal statements, must be interpreted in context; the same nonverbal behavior is capable of serving very different functions (Patterson, 1982a, 1984). Rather than possessing inherent meaning, nonverbal cues contribute to intimate interaction in two ways: (1) they communicate specific emotional messages when considered in the light of other available information; and (2) they sometimes intensify the emotions experienced during an interaction (e.g. Argyle and Dean, 1965; Ellsworth, 1975; Patterson, 1982a). Given our earlier suggestion that primitive aspects of intimacy are evident in infant-caregiver interactions (before the infant is verbally proficient), the prominence of touching, gazing, etc., in adult romantic interactions, and the importance of nonverbal factors in communicating openness (Montgomery, 1981b), nonverbal components of intimacy are especially central in a process model meant to apply, at least in certain respects, across the lifespan.

Exchange and interdependence theories. Recent social psychological research on interaction processes is heavily influenced by equity theory (Walster, Berscheid and Walster, 1973). According to this theory, intimate relationships, like most other kinds of relationships, are satisfying to the extent that participants' contributions (inputs) and outcomes (rewards minus costs) are perceived to be balanced (Hatfield, 1982). Contributions and outcomes must be construed broadly, however, so that qualities specific to intimacy are included—loving

and jealous feelings, support and rejection, sex, and security, for example. Further, because intimate relationships involve long-term interdependence in diverse kinds of activities, perceptions of equity and inequity must be considered not just relative to a single interaction but also across resource classes and periods of time (Perlman and Fehr, 1987; Reis, 1986).

An alternative point of view has been elaborated by Mills and Clark (1982), who assert that exchange rules apply only to relatively casual or economically oriented interactions. In communal interactions, which are more likely to include intimacy, benefits are instead given and received in response to interaction partners' needs. In research on the communal/exchange distinction (Clark, 1986), the causal arrows are bidirectional. That is, not only do communal relationships involve attending to partners' needs (rather than to equity considerations), the act of meeting another person's needs may foster development of a communal relationship. More important for our purposes, when these needs pertain to self-definitions and self-relevant emotions, responding to needs rather than adhering to equity rules is likely to engender feelings of being understood and cared for (Clark, 1985). Consequently, one way in which interaction partners can increase or decrease the intimacy of a given interaction is to regulate their responsiveness to each other's expressed or inferred needs. Given that individuals frequently seek to increase the intimacy level of their relationships (Miell and Duck, 1986), interpersonal exchange processes often follow a needs rule rather than an equity rule.

Lay and Psychometric Conceptions of Intimacy

One final source of ideas and information regarding the components and dimensions of intimacy is the literature on everyday conceptions of intimacy, and the translation of these and more formal conceptions into measures with research and clinical utility.

Waring and his collaborators (Waring *et al.*, 1980) asked a sample of adults what intimacy meant to them and derived eight categories from their answers. In a second study (Waring *et al.*, 1980), married couples spontaneously mentioned these categories in the following order of importance: affection, expressiveness (including self-disclosure), sexuality, cohesion (commitment), compatibility, autonomy (from parents), conflict (*not* arguing or criticizing), and identity (knowing oneself, knowing one's needs, and enjoying adequate self-esteem). Helgeson, Shaver and Dyer (1987) extracted prototypes from college students' open-ended accounts of personal instances of intimacy and distance in same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. At the heart of both sexes' prototypes of intimacy were feelings and expressions of closeness, appreciation, and affection; evident but less prominent were informational self-disclosures. In contrast, prototypes of distance centered on felt and expressed dissatisfaction and disapproval. These studies call attention to the importance of emotions, particularly affection, in everyday conceptions of intimacy.

Questionnaire measures reflect more formal conceptions of intimacy. For example, the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships questionnaire

(PAIR) developed by Schaefer and Olson (1981) assesses five aspects of intimacy: emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational. Tesch's (1985) questionnaire, examined by factor analysis, seems to tap three domains: romantic love, supportiveness, and communication ease. Guerney's (1977) questionnaire assesses a combination of intimacy and interpersonal trust. The scale designed by Miller and Lefcourt (1982) measures the maximum level of intimacy currently experienced in a respondent's closest relationship. Eriksonian intimacy status can be assessed with a questionnaire designed by Ochse and Plug (1986). McAdams (1982a; this volume) developed a TAT measure of intimacy motivation; which he defines as a 'preference or readiness for experiences of closeness, warmth, and communication' (p. 134). (See Chelune and Waring, 1984, for a review of intimacy measures.)

Taken together, the available measures reveal some of the issues to be considered when constructing a process model of intimacy. When combined with the foregoing theoretical summaries, it is apparent that intimacy is an interpersonal process that involves communication of personal feelings and information to another person who responds warmly and sympathetically. This response validates the first person's experiences, and thereby deepens the relationship and encourages returned affection and support.

A MODEL OF THE INTIMACY PROCESS

All of the theories and research reviewed in the previous section are, we would argue, compatible with the model of intimacy shown in Figure 1. The model is intended to be transactional: intimacy occurs between two people, A and B, who influence each other's feelings and behavior over time. For convenience,

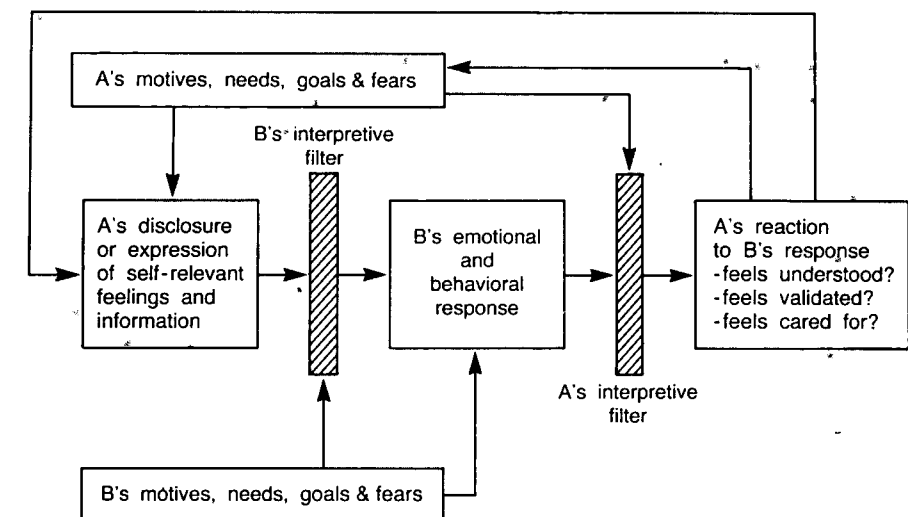


Figure 1

we present a single episode in which A serves as discloser or expresser and B serves as responder, but in many situations the two participants freely exchange roles. The process can commence at any of several points, but we begin our analysis with participants' motives, fears, and goals. Included in the model are both participants' actions (e.g. comments, expressions), emotions, and interpretations.

A's Motives, Fears, and Goals

As Mehrabian and Ksionzky (1974) have shown, approach and avoidance motives independently determine affiliative behavior, and the same is likely to be true for intimate behavior. Intimacy may be sought because a person desires affection, self-understanding, or self-validation; wishes to share feelings; feels lonely; wants guidance; feels sexually attracted—the list of incentives is virtually endless. In conflict with approach tendencies are a host of fears that make people reluctant to become intimate, including, for example, fear of exposure, fear of abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses, and fear of engulfment (Hatfield, 1984). The roots of many of these desires and fears can be traced to earlier relationship experiences, some reaching as far back as early childhood. A partner's response can substantially alter the relative impact of these approach and avoidance tendencies, which, regardless of personal history, everyone experiences in some mixture at the beginning of potentially intimate encounters.

Besides having needs that relate specifically to intimacy, a person in A's position can presumably regulate self-disclosure and expression of feelings strategically—to test a partner's responsiveness, for example; to define a relationship in a certain way (e.g. as communal or exchange-oriented); or to restrict or intensify a relationship (Miell and Duck, 1986; Snyder and Smith, 1986). Thus, a model of intimacy must include fluctuating motives, needs, and strategic concerns that affect A's disclosure. It is unsafe to assume that A has perpetual, constant tendencies towards intimacy that are independent of specific desires, fears, and goals.

A's Disclosure or Emotional Expression

Given some mixture of motives, goals, and fears, the intimacy process begins with A revealing some aspect of self, verbally or nonverbally, intentionally or unintentionally. Often, especially early in the development of an intimate relationship, A reveals something in spite of (or, occasionally, because of) feeling defensive, guarded, or fearful about rejection, manipulation, or engulfment. In our conceptualization, disclosure of personal desires, fantasies, anxieties, and emotions is generally more important to developing intimacy than is disclosure of mere facts. Such disclosure is valuable because it provides an opportunity, which may or may not be acted upon, for B to validate and indicate caring for A's 'inner self'. This inner self, as discussed by Emde (1983), is an affective core that persists, with increasing complexity and depth, across

the lifespan, despite substantial changes in external roles, relationships, appearance, and settings:

Because our affective core touches upon those aspects of experience which are most important to us as individuals, it also allows us to get in touch with the uniqueness of our own (and others') experience. . . . Once we are in touch with another's emotional life, we are in touch with his or her humanity; this kind of understanding then becomes a basis for going further and appreciating that individual as a unique human being. (p. 180)

A related point is made by Markus and Nurius (1986). They suggest that a person's self-knowledge encompasses not only who one is, but also who one might become, who one would like to become, and who one is afraid of becoming. These 'possible selves' link self-knowledge and motivation; they are 'the cognitive components of hopes, fears, goals, and threats' (p. 954). Revealing these possible selves and other affectively laden, self-relevant information provides the material to which B responds.

An example may clarify the distinction between facts and feelings. Consider this factual disclosure: 'My sixth-grade teacher made fun of me in front of the entire class one day.' From this statement, the listener knows relatively little about the speaker. Emotional elaborations give the event personal meaning, and hence intimacy potential. Contrast 'I was humiliated and am still afraid to speak in front of audiences' with 'That made me the hero of the class from then on'. The two pictures of the inner emotional self differ considerably.

Recent studies in two specialized research areas also highlight the importance of emotional self-disclosure. First, Fitzpatrick (1986) has argued that in marriage, once partners come to know each other, communication of feelings rather than facts is the key determinant of relationship satisfaction. Second, studies of therapeutic interactions demonstrate that emotional processes—such as elaborating emotional expression, accessing previously unacknowledged feelings, and restructuring emotions—are better predictors of therapy outcome than are simple informational disclosures (Greenberg and Safran, 1987).

Communication of feelings obviously need not be verbal. Extensive research indicates that there are identifiable facial, gestural, and paralinguistic cues associated with human emotions (Ekman, Friesen and Ellsworth, 1972; Hornstein, 1985; Izard, 1977; Scherer and Ekman, 1982). Even when people intentionally suppress affect, autonomic markers of emotional states are clearly identifiable (Buck, 1984; Cacioppo, 1986). Facial expressions of emotion can be recognized beyond chance in the absence of other information (Wagner, MacDonald and Manstead, 1986); when contextual cues and prior knowledge about the person expressing the emotion are added, nonverbally transmitted information greatly enhances communication of emotions.

Because people are familiar with the typical components and patterns of the basic emotions (Schwartz and Shaver, 1987; Shaver *et al.*, 1987), they do not require complete information to understand an interaction partner's emotion-related motives, appraisals, action tendencies, and self-regulatory efforts. For example, anger occurs when a person perceives that someone or something is

unfairly interfering with attainment of a valued goal. An interaction partner's implicit understanding of anger allows him or her to infer unobserved portions of an anger scenario, such as the underlying desires or values being blocked, or the appraisal linking motives and reactions. Therefore, emotional expression, even without much verbal elaboration, permits interaction partners to respond supportively. In fact, people often feel revealed to others even when little or no intentional communication has taken place—for example when interacting with an insightful therapist, an old friend who knows how one feels, or a stranger with whom one happens to 'click'.

The key aspect of disclosure, then, is the expression of feelings and experiences that characterize the discloser's inner self. Because language and nonverbal cues can be revealing in the absence of intentional disclosure, we rely on the term 'expression' to signify transmission of self-relevant information through any channel.

B's Motives and Interpretive Filter

B, occupying the role of responder, is influenced by a mixture of momentarily active concerns, positive and negative, just as A is. B may want to be a good friend or partner, may have an unusually high need for nurturance, may be strategically interested in creating a feeling of obligation on A's part, and so on. Once again, the list is virtually endless. At the same time, B may fear commitment, dread A's dependency, worry about hurting A, etc. As B interprets A's disclosures and expressions, and prepares to respond, a complex array of motives and goals is at work.

Also influential are B's dispositionally and situationally induced interpretive tendencies, which in Figure 1 are summarized by the term 'interpretive filter'. A large body of social psychological research (reviewed by Markus and Zajonc, 1985) indicates that expectations and schemas profoundly influence interpretations of interaction partners' behavior. For example, A's touch might be construed as spontaneous or manipulative, affectionate or sexist, depending on B's proclivities. Crying may be considered endearing or maudlin, anger seen as justified or immature, and an intimate disclosure received as welcome or presumptuous. There are several legitimate perspectives on such an interchange: A may intend one thing, B perceive another, and outside observers see something different. What matters for B's response is B's construal of A's expression.

Bowlby's ideas about inner working models, as well as the writings of various social-cognitive theorists (Fiske and Taylor, 1984; Kelly, 1955; Mischel, 1973), are relevant to B's interpretive filter. Based on past experiences, people develop general expectations about the manner in which their intimacy-seeking behavior will be received. For example, repeated rejection may lead to an expectation of rejection and humiliation, and thereby to a justifiable fear of self-exposure (Kelvin, 1977). The tendency of mental representations of social experiences to perpetuate themselves by reinforcing certain views of relationships established early in life has been discussed by Sroufe and Fleeson (1985). Some

of these representations probably influence adult friendships, romances, and parenting experiences.

Hazan and Shaver (1987) found, for example, that avoidant lovers—those with a history of rejection by primary attachment figures—were especially likely to fear intimacy, believe that romantic love rarely lasts, and doubt that other people are well intentioned and good hearted. Anxious, clingy lovers—those with a history of inconsistent, unpredictable relationships—reported that they fell in love quickly and frequently, experienced intense jealousy, and believed that others were reluctant to commit themselves to a long-term relationship. In contrast, secure lovers expressed positive views about both self and others, and said that lasting, satisfying love was attainable. Most likely, these kinds of beliefs, perhaps founded in early childhood and then confirmed repeatedly via self-fulfilling prophecies (Darley and Fazio, 1980), affect responses to conversational leads, disclosure efforts, and expressions of emotions in potentially intimate interactions.

B's Response to A's Self-Expression

In our model, B's response to A's expression is as important as A's initial disclosure in determining whether an interaction will become intimate. Appropriate responses enhance feelings of connectedness, whereas inappropriate responses or deliberate nonresponsiveness keep interactants at a distance (Kurth, 1970). The role of the listener's response in self-disclosure has been documented in a number of studies. For example, Miller, Berg and Archer (1983) found that the amount of self-disclosure was a function of both the speaker's and the listener's predispositions. Their questionnaire, the Openers Scale, assesses self-reported ability to elicit intimate disclosures from others. More generally, Davis (1982) has noted that responsiveness, which she defines as verbal and nonverbal elaboration by a listener that is matched and relevant to the speaker's comments, plays an important role in facilitating communication and interpersonal attraction. Nonresponsive listeners are perceived as uninterested or uncomprehending (Davis and Perkowitz, 1979), two characteristics antithetical to intimacy (Miller and Berg, 1984).

Of the theorists discussed earlier, Rogers placed the most emphasis on the listener's role in intimate interactions. He thought it critical that a listener communicate unconditional acceptance and warm regard if the goal was to help the speaker feel understood, valued, and intimately connected. Responsiveness of this sort is important even to infants. Stern (1986) has shown that infants develop strong feelings of security and attachment when caregivers communicate that they are aware of, and responsive to, the infant's needs and feelings—by soothing the infant when it appears to feel irritable, for example, or playing boisterously when the infant seems to prefer activity. Such responsiveness engenders a deeply reassuring sense of interpersonal trust and fosters an intimate tie with the caregiver. Nonresponsiveness, in contrast, produces in the infant a sense of alienation and withdrawal from others. In the manner of

Bowlby's inner working models, this orientation may interfere with close relationships later in life.

We do not wish to imply that the bulk of the variance in disclosure and responsiveness resides in individual dispositions. Everyone has interactions in which he or she discloses a lot or a little and responds warmly or coolly, depending on context, partner, mood, and interaction goals. Miller and Kenny (1986), in a study of disclosure among members of a sorority, demonstrated that reciprocity of self-disclosure is overwhelmingly a function of the unique relationship between two people, above and beyond trait-like dispositions to disclose and be disclosed to. This points to the importance of a transactional perspective on the intimacy process.

Finally, we should mention briefly the positive, rewarding emotions that often accompany the listener's role. Both therapists and parents of infants often describe intense feelings of intimacy in interactions with their clients and offspring, respectively, even though the interactions are clearly nonreciprocal: therapists rarely disclose as much as their clients do, and infants are incapable of understanding or deliberately validating their parents' identities. Yet therapists and parents experience warm feelings in these special relationships which they readily label as 'intimate', 'touching', and 'special' in ways corresponding closely to lay conceptions of intimacy. In other words, both A and B may feel intimate even when only A discloses.

A's Interpretive Filter and Reactions to B's Response

Although B's response has features that can be objectively described, what matters most is A's interpretation of and reaction to B's behavior. After all, if A perceives B to be unsupportive or overly intrusive, perhaps because of A's insecurity or because B's good intentions have been poorly realized, an intimate interaction is unlikely to occur. This is why Figure 1 includes an interpretive filter for A. Our earlier discussion of B's interpretive filter also applies to A.

According to the model, for an interaction to be experienced as intimate by A, he or she must register three qualities in B's response: understanding, validation, and caring. Understanding refers to A's belief that B accurately perceives A's needs, constructs, feelings, self-definition, and life predicaments. This is an important part of the intimacy process for at least three reasons. First, the concept of intimacy implies that formerly private aspects of the self have been communicated (Chelune, Robison and Kommor, 1984). One cannot respond contingently to another person's inner qualities if these qualities remain unknown. Second, the provision of relevant and helpful support and advice, a key component of intimate relationships, requires shared knowledge; without it, the offered support may prove inappropriate to A's needs. Third, and most important, to feel validated, A must believe that B values and appreciates A's inner self as A himself or herself understands it. Otherwise, B's response, no matter how well intentioned and seemingly sympathetic, cannot be received as validating inasmuch as it is irrelevant, perhaps even antithetical, to A's self-understanding.

For several reasons, we (and Derlega, 1984) focus on understanding primarily as a precursor of validation. Recall Sullivan's (1953) observation that mature self-esteem and sociability develop in large part through the 'validation of all components of personal worth' (p. 246) which an intimate chum provides. Once A has experienced such intimacy and its attendant gratifications, it becomes a salient goal for subsequent relationships. Social comparison processes, which are motivated partly by the desire for validation (Goethals, 1986; Goethals and Darley, 1977), influence selective affiliation. In other words, people generally choose to interact with others who are likely to confirm their views of themselves and the world (Schlenker, 1984; Wheeler, 1974). As mentioned earlier, the importance of validation has also been documented in studies of marital communication and satisfaction (Gottman, 1979).

Early self-disclosure theorists (Altman and Taylor, 1973; Jourard, 1964) portrayed the act of self-revelation not as an automatic stimulus to interpersonal closeness but as a catalyst that allows interaction partners to express similarity, support, and liking for each other. In fact, empirical studies indicate that self-disclosure does not consistently lead to enhanced liking and trust (Berscheid, 1985b). Rather, 'the reward or nonreward from disclosing [derives] from the reaction of a recipient to a disclosure' (Altman and Taylor, 1973, p. 52). Positive, validating reactions to self-disclosure are the discloser's main reward.

The third important component of A's reaction to B's response is feeling cared for. Many cognitively oriented models of the acquaintance process (e.g. Byrne, 1971; Chelune, Robison and Kommor, 1984) focus on the 'partners' shared understandings and expectations, slighting the role of affect. (For example, Chelune *et al.* define intimacy as 'a subjective appraisal, based on interactive behaviors, that leads to certain relational expectations' [Chelune, Robison and Kommor, 1984, p. 13].) There are several reasons why an intimate relationship is necessarily affectionate. Human infants have probably been primed by evolution to feel positive emotions when safely in contact with others and negative emotions (especially anxiety and anger) when these ties are disrupted (Bowlby, 1969; Sroufe and Waters, 1977). Good feelings reinforce the infant's proximity-seeking and the caregiver's nurturance, both of which promote the infant's survival (Bowlby, 1969). It may also be the case that the most secure adult relationships are those that engender comparable feelings of acceptance and being cared for, either because the underlying mechanism is the same (Konner, 1982) or because adult interactions echo past emotional experiences.

The significance of feeling well liked has been demonstrated in many studies of interpersonal attraction and relationship development (Berscheid, 1985b; Burgeess and Huston, 1979). Prevailing theories of affiliation and social exchange are based on the principle that satisfying interactions are likely to be continued, a general tendency that undoubtedly applies specifically to intimate interactions. The role of caring in intimacy goes beyond its immediate emotional impact, however. Individuals who are unsure about a partner's esteem are unlikely to disclose personal feelings that might lead to rejection, ridicule, or embarrassment (Altman and Taylor, 1973). Reticence in such situations likely precludes

validation of some of the most personal aspects of self—fears, vulnerabilities, socially undesirable traits, and regrettable past actions (Archer, 1980; Kelvin, 1977). Consequently, as Rogers (1961) pointed out, the remaining parts of the intimacy process are unlikely to arise in the absence of caring.

Self-disclosure that oversteps normative limits may also be related to caring. Interaction partners and neutral observers generally attribute negative characteristics, such as immaturity, insecurity, and excessive needs for friendship, to individuals who reveal more than is situationally and relationally appropriate (Wortman *et al.*, 1976). In our model, such disclosure is interpreted as an exaggerated (and usually ineffective) search for intimacy that disregards typical hesitations about displaying vulnerability (Kelvin, 1977), and ignores strategic consideration of B's potential response. A study by Prager (1986) provides support for this explanation. Whereas subjects in her study who had attained an intimate relationship (in the Eriksonian sense) disclosed more personal information to their closest friend than to a stranger, subjects who had not attained an intimate relationship did not distinguish between close friends and strangers, disclosing equally and extensively to both.

If intimacy depends on A's reaction to B's response, it might be asked how closely A's reaction corresponds to B's intention. To some extent, this process involves perceptual bias. Reis, Senchak and Solomon (1985) found that persons who typically engage in more intimate interaction also perceive greater intimacy in videotapes of other people's conversations. Studies of marital interaction have shown greater discrepancies between the intent and impact of a communication in unhappy marriages than in happy marriages, presumably because underlying negative affect provides an interpretive context in which a given message is evaluated more negatively (e.g. Gottman, 1979; Noller, 1987). Similar processes have been demonstrated in non-distressed couples' emotional communication. Gaelick, Bodenhausen and Wyer (1985) found that in the case of love, emotional reactions were based largely on the listener's perceptions, independent of the amount of love the speaker intended to convey. On the other hand, both perceptions and intentions affected reactions to expressed hostility. Clearly, A's reaction to B's response depends on more than the objective or consciously intended features of B's behavior.

Finally, it is important to note that the substance of intimate interaction need not be limited to revealing conversations or nonverbal communication. Interaction partners also establish, intensify, and maintain intimacy in the manner in which they respond to each other's needs (Mills and Clark, 1982). As Kelley (1979, 1984) notes, emotions and attributions within a relationship derive from the habitual patterns by which partners respond to each other's needs and desires, and integrate them with their own needs and desires. When these patterns, however they may be displayed, are perceived to be understanding, validating, and caring, intimacy is heightened. For example, a husband's staying home on his poker night to prepare a candlelight dinner for his wife's birthday might be perceived as a responsive and intimate act. Especially in the context of satisfying, long-term close relationships, people may know their

partners well enough to engender in them a validating and affectionate reaction without explicit self-relevant communication.

Feedback

Given what we have already said, it is possible to indicate briefly how intimate interactions can promote both personal development and willingness to enter into subsequent intimate interactions. B's understanding and validation of A's expression may help A become somewhat less defensive and fearful, and may incline A to like and trust B. If no restrictions preclude A's exchanging roles with B, the first step towards intimacy may be followed by a second step in which B discloses and A responds sensitively and supportively. Of course, if an interaction episode fails, for any of numerous possible reasons, to move towards greater intimacy, the effect may be to increase defensiveness and decrease approach motives, thereby diminishing the likelihood that two people will develop an intimate relationship.

FROM INTERACTIONS TO RELATIONSHIPS

In our model we have focused on the intimacy process as it occurs in a single interaction. This approach is consistent with our view that intimacy is a dynamic process whose operation is best observed in the pattern of communication and reaction between two people. Nevertheless, intimate interactions typically, but by no means exclusively, take place in the context of ongoing intimate relationships. Therefore, we now consider how the process itself affects, and is affected by, relationship factors.

Although it may be tempting to see an intimate relationship as a simple aggregation of many intimate interactions between two people, the need for a more complex conception has been noted in prior writings. Hinde (1981), for example, points out that 'just as interactions involve emergent properties not relevant to the behavior of individuals in isolation, so also do relationships involve properties not relevant to their component interactions' (p. 3). Interactions and relationships require different levels of analysis, each with its own focus and each capable of supplying insights to the other (Acitelli and Duck, 1987). In our view, it makes most sense to conceptualize intimate relationships as 'digested' products (Duck and Sants, 1983) of past interactions: that is, as dyadic connections that possess special properties deriving from, but extending beyond, the content of individual intimate episodes. Six specific issues seem important to the 'digestion' process:

- (1) Relationships embody a temporal perspective, including a history and an imagined future (Hinde, 1981; Kelley *et al.*, 1983). Reconstructions of past encounters (such as fond or hurtful memories) and anticipations of future events affect the interaction process by influencing goals, motives, and the readiness of partners to be mutually open and responsive. Moreover, early experiences provide a standard against which later outcomes can be evalu-

ated. Because intimate relationships generally span long time periods, and because needs and fears may be especially potent in shaping people's impressions of emotionally laden communications and interactions, feelings and judgements that encompass temporal perspectives may reveal important features of intimate relationships.

- (2) In an intimate relationship, partners generally feel committed to their association with each other, over and above momentary variation in positive or negative feelings (Kelley *et al.*, 1983). Commitment arises from many sources—love, moral or legal obligation, fear of being alone, and especially, the emotions engendered in intimate interaction. Whatever its origin, commitment implies stability, security, and readiness to attempt to maintain the relationship in spite of inevitable conflict. Committed partners should also be more likely to play a responsive and supportive listening role for each other.
- (3) Intimate partners usually develop metaperspectives on their relationship: that is, a sense of 'we-ness' that arises from awareness of their mutual bond (Acitelli and Duck, 1987; Levinger and Snoek, 1972; McCall, this volume). Two factors are involved here: first, mutuality, in that each partner can, at least to some extent, share the other's experiences; and second, recognition of common assumptions and understandings about the relationship.
- (4) Intimate relationships are typically reciprocal and mutual, although certain special cases, such as therapy and parenting, appear more one-sided. The feedback loops in our model indicate how the experience of validation and caring in one interaction episode may predispose partners to respond similarly in a subsequent episode. Moreover, in communal relationships, both partners respond to each other's needs and expect that their own needs will be addressed (Mills and Clark, 1982).
- (5) Intimate relationships often involve public recognition of the association between two people. Not all intimate relationships are public, of course, but many are—those between spouses, best friends, and close siblings, for example (Hays, 1985; Wheeler and Nezlek, 1977). As a result, and perhaps also because perceivers tend to link individuals who like each other (Heider, 1958), intimate friends may be treated as a social unit by others. Common experiences with the external world are therefore likely, enhancing shared activities and perspectives but perhaps also making individuation somewhat problematic (cf. Rook, this volume).
- (6) Because intimate relationships develop from a history of largely favorable experiences, relatively positive stable expectations and patterns of interdependence tend to emerge (Chelune, Robison and Kommor, 1984; Kelley *et al.*, 1983). Such stability engenders confidence, security, dependability, and trust, all of which facilitate further intimacy by building appropriate predispositions and fostering self-expression and supportive responding. The trust-building process goes beyond predictability. In Rempel, Holmes and Zanna's (1985) analysis, faith—confidence in a partner over and above predictions rooted in prior experience—is the key defining feature of interpersonal trust. Of course, conflict is rarely absent in intimate relationships.

Disagreements, misunderstandings, and areas of incompatibility are bound to arise, and when they do, they can be extremely self-revealing. When handled sensitively and responsively, disclosures of discomfort, disappointment, and anger can be an important part of the intimacy process. Moreover, sharing personal or relational difficulties can contribute to intimacy (Braiker and Kelley, 1979).

In short, relationships that result from the psychological 'digestion' of intimate interactions clearly, and often quickly, become more than the sum of individual episodes from which they are built. Viewed from the relationship side of the interaction-relationship system, intimate relationships create a framework of trust, stable expectations, and practices within which intimate interactions are more likely, and thereby increase feelings of being understood, validated, and cared for. When partners sense that they mutually foster these feelings in each other, they become more aware that their relationship is intimate and typically become more committed to it.

DOES INTIMACY MATTER?

Some authors seek to justify the study of intimacy by pointing to its beneficial personal and relational consequences. This approach is sensible if it is not unduly defensive: that is, if it does not obscure the fact that intimacy is intrinsically rewarding. As we have indicated in our model, intimacy involves feeling understood, validated, cared for, and closely connected with another person. It inherently entails lowering defenses and reducing self-doubts and self-reproach. It includes enjoyment of caring for another, of fostering his or her increased self-insight and personal growth. (Of course, intimate relationships have a dark side too, which is explored by other authors in this Handbook [cf. Gotlib and Hooley, Gottlieb, Hobfoll and Stokes, Dillard and Miller, and Rook].) Nevertheless, because examination of intimacy's positive consequences helps locate it within a broader conception of human well-being, we will briefly discuss three research areas in which it plays a central role.

Social Goals and Loneliness

The demands and structures of everyday work and social activity dictate that most interactions not be intimate (Delia, 1980; Hays, 1985). Many surveys and studies, however, demonstrate that when asked what they most want in their social lives, people generally mention close relationships of an intimate sort (e.g. Astin, 1985; Caldwell and Peplau, 1982; Veroff, Douvan and Kulka, 1981; Weiss, 1974). Absence of intimate interaction consequently may be expected to produce a sense of personal failure in the social realm. Studies of loneliness support this contention. Loneliness, defined as a negative discrepancy between actual and desired social relations (Peplau and Perlman, 1982), has numerous detrimental consequences, including anxiety, depression and helplessness, and self-deprecation. These discrepancies can and do involve dissatisfaction along

many different dimensions of social participation, one of which is intimacy. Wheeler, Reis and Nezlek (1983) found that lack of intimacy was a better predictor of loneliness than were other dimensions of interaction quality and an assortment of quantitative indices, such as frequency of interaction, time spent socializing, and number of partners. Cutrona (1982) and Williams and Solano (1983) also showed that interaction quantity predicted loneliness less well than did satisfaction and intimacy. It seems appropriate therefore to view absence of intimate interaction as a cause of loneliness.

The desire for intimacy may be on the rise in American society. In a comparison of survey data collected in 1957 and 1976, Veroff, Douvan and Kulka (1981) concluded that the appeal of intimacy, across domains as diverse as work, family, friendship, and personal growth, had increased dramatically. One might ask why self-validation, close sharing of feelings and experiences, and affection are more attractive now than they were 30 years ago. The human potential movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s may have sensitized Americans to the benefits of intimacy, and thereby enhanced its appeal. In a more dispiriting vein, Perlman and Fehr (1987) suggest that increases in urbanism, divorce, and single-parent families contribute to loneliness and inability to satisfy existing needs for intimacy. We would add to this list trends towards greater geographic mobility, lesser reliance on extended families, and growing career pressures. These factors imply that the heightened interest in intimacy noted by Veroff *et al.* may partly reflect failures in the traditional sources of intimate bonds.

Intimacy and Social Support

Social support is the focus of much current research. Many studies indicate that the perception of social support buffers the impact of stress and facilitates psychological and physical health (Cohen and Syme, 1985). The roots of social support in personality and interaction processes have remained elusive to date. Although studies demonstrating necessary levels of discriminant validity are rare, recent research implicates intimacy as a central determinant of certain forms of social support. For example, Reis (1987) found that interaction intimacy was the best predictor of appraisal support (feeling that useful advice and guidance is available) and group belonging support (feeling integrated in a community of friends). Both of these dimensions of support have been shown to have substantial health benefits. Similarly, although many authors have assumed incautiously that marriage *per se* provides social support, Gove, Hughes and Style (1983) demonstrated that only high-quality marriages—which in our model include intimacy—produce this effect.

Other social support theorists who give priority to intimacy include Brown and Harris (1978) and Hobfoll, Nadler and Lieberman (1986). Miller and Lefcourt (1982), in one of the few studies explicitly linking intimacy and health, showed that high levels of intimacy were effective in buffering the impact of stress. Pennebaker and Beale (1986) found that disclosure of deeply emotional material (e.g. rape episodes) led to improved mental and physical health in a

longitudinal follow-up. Findings such as these led one of us to conclude elsewhere that feelings of social support derive more from intimacy than from any other feature of social interaction (Reis, 1984).

Psychological Well-Being and Personal Adjustment

In addition to having social value, intimacy also influences individual psychological health. McAdams and Vaillant (1982), for example, found better psychosocial adjustment in a sample of middle-aged men who had shown higher levels of intimacy motivation during their early twenties. Other studies demonstrate positive associations between intimacy and various dimensions of psychological maturity (e.g. ego development; Loevinger, 1976) and subjective well-being (e.g. positive mood; Reis, 1987). Intimacy problems are also closely linked to many mental health disorders (see Fisher and Stricker, 1982, for a review).

Intimate relationships can, in certain circumstances, affect individual growth and development adversely, by stifling independence, discouraging role flexibility, and inducing feelings of engulfment or vulnerability (see chapters in this Handbook by Hobfoll and Stokes, and Rook). In the majority of instances, however, the intimacy process facilitates psychological health. The process begins in the attachment relationship between infants and their caregivers. In favorable cases, caregivers serve as a secure base from which infants confidently explore their environment and thereby develop a sense of competence, mastery, and self-esteem (Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978). During adolescence, intimacy with a same-sex chum promotes identity development (Sullivan, 1953). Intimate relationships attained in early adulthood foster productivity, creativity, and emotional integration later in life (Erikson, 1950). Moreover, throughout the lifespan, intimacy is an important, if not the most important, component of interaction in successful therapeutic interventions (Fisher and Stricker, 1982; Greenberg and Safran, 1987; Rogers, 1961). As a social process, then, intimacy plays a prominent role in individual psychological growth and well-being.

CONCLUSION

In our opening paragraph, we mentioned that the terms 'intimate' and 'intimacy' refer to a vast array of phenomena: feelings ('feeling intimate'), styles of verbal and nonverbal communication, behaviors, arrangements in space, personality traits, sexual activities, and kinds of long-term relationships. We asked: What, if anything do these different phenomena have in common? Do all of them relate in some way to making one's innermost qualities known? It should now be possible to suggest answers.

Intimacy is an interpersonal process within which two interaction partners experience and express feelings, communicate verbally and nonverbally, satisfy social motives, augment or reduce social fears, talk and learn about themselves and their unique characteristics, and become 'close' (psychologically and often physically: touching, using intimate names and tones of voice, perhaps having

sex). Under certain conditions, repeated interactions characterized by this process develop into intimate relationships. Within an intimate relationship, some interactions will be intimate in the sense of our process model and many will not. If the frequency and quality of intimate interactions decline below some level which is probably unique to different couples and individuals, the relationship will no longer feel and be perceived as intimate by one or both partners. It will, to use Levinger's (1983) apt term, become 'hollow'. If enjoyment of intimacy was a major reason for establishing and maintaining the relationship, the partners may begin to mourn its death, feel lonely, and consider separation.

Looking back at the theories reviewed in the first section of this chapter, we see that they all map onto the process model presented in the second section. For example, Bowlby's attachment theory states, in essence, that an infant with inborn needs for proximity to a caregiver and with inborn fears of isolation, pain, strange noises, etc., is capable of feeling relaxed, secure, and attached if provided with a reliable, emotionally available, and responsive caregiver. Provided with security-inducing social experiences, the infant becomes a confident explorer of the environment and a more competent interactor with peers. Eventually, such an infant becomes a more empathic and responsive friend, lover, and parent: in other words, a good candidate for subsequent intimate interactions and relationships. Sullivan's theory centers on intimacy between same-sex friends during preadolescence. During this time, children become increasingly aware of their internal psychological states and capable of discussing and comparing them with the newly discovered states and traits of same-sex chums. This is a risky process, one fraught with opportunities for exposure and rejection. When it works, however, it enhances identity development. Erikson's statements about intimacy concern the establishment of a committed heterosexual relationship in the early adult years. We know from both research and personal experience that such relationships can be frightening and challenging, yet when they go well—i.e. when the balance of intimacy over discord and disappointment is positive—they provide some of life's greatest rewards.

Because the intimacy process has been repeatedly rediscovered in all of the social sciences that deal with close relationships, it deserves careful study. One of today's most influential clinical theorists, Heinz Kohut (1978), has developed a 'self psychology' with many features similar to the theories of Bowlby, Sullivan, Erikson, and especially Rogers (cf. Kahn, 1985). The periodic rediscovery of central insights into the process by which intimate interactions reduce defensiveness, increase self-insight and self-integration, and contribute to self-esteem and social development clearly indicates that the intimacy process modeled in Figure 1 will not go away. Rather than continuing to recloak the process in new (and sometimes obfuscating) theoretical language, it would behoove social scientists to examine and attempt to clarify the persistent core that repeats itself almost regardless of an investigator's starting point.

Just as the proverbial elephant has many parts, intimacy is a multicomponent process. But the elephant has certain coherently organized features that make

it a unique creature, and so does intimacy. We have attempted to identify and describe the coherently organized components of the intimacy process and indicate how this process is embedded in intimate relationships. Intimacy has been shown to be important to people's health and well-being, and to be a worthy goal in its own right. Its repeated appearance in the literatures on friendship, marriage, childrearing, communication, psychotherapy, and personality development lead us to believe that it will remain an essential focus of theories of interpersonal relations.

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