

CLOSE ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT

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Commitment and Relationship Maintenance Mechanisms

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Sometimes involvement with a close partner is simple. When partners' goals correspond and their preferences are compatible, partners can readily achieve desirable outcomes such as security, companionship, and sexual fulfillment. When circumstances of interdependence are congenial, it is relatively easy for partners to gratify one another's most important needs. The real test of a relationship arises when circumstances are not so congenial—when partners encounter dilemmas involving conflicted interaction, incompatible preferences, extrarelationship temptation, or experience of betrayal. In dilemmas of this sort, the well-being of each person is incompatible with the well-being of the relationship and something must give. Thus, sometimes it is not so easy to maintain a healthy and vital ongoing relationship.

Over the past two decades, we have conducted a program of research that explores the means by which close partners manage to sustain healthy, long-term relationships. Our model of persistence and couple well-being employs the principles and constructs of interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). This chapter describes the main propositions and findings from our ongoing research program. First, we review the interdependence theoretic principles that underlie our work, describing interdependence dilemmas, discussing partners' adaptations to such dilemmas, and outlining the manner in which partners' adaptations become embodied in personal dispositions, relationship-specific motives, and normative prescriptions. Second, we

discuss three primary bases for dependence on a relationship, introduce the concept of commitment, and describe the role of commitment in promoting persistence and maintenance behaviors. Third, we review research regarding each of several relationship maintenance phenomena, including both (a) behavioral maintenance mechanisms (accommodative behavior, willingness to sacrifice, and forgiveness of betrayal), and (b) cognitive maintenance mechanisms (cognitive interdependence, positive illusion, and the derogation of tempting alternatives). Fourth, we describe recent work regarding mutual cyclical growth, discussing the manner in which one person's dependence, commitment, and enactment of maintenance behaviors affects the partner's trust and willingness to become increasingly dependent on the relationship. We conclude with a discussion of the benefits of an interdependence theoretic analysis of behavior in ongoing close relationships.

AN INTERDEPENDENCE THEORETIC ANALYSIS OF RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

Interdependence Dilemmas in Ongoing Relationships

As noted earlier, the real test of a relationship arises when partners encounter dilemmas involving conflicted interaction, incompatible preferences, and the like. An interdependence dilemma is termed a *dilemma* because it involves noncorrespondent outcomes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Interdependence dilemmas are situations in which the immediate well-being of one person is incompatible with the immediate well-being of the partner and relationship. Interdependence dilemmas involve conflicting motives. On the one hand, there may be compelling reasons for the individual to pursue immediate self-interest. On the other hand, there may be compelling reasons to promote the interests of one's relationship. Resolving interdependence dilemmas therefore entails some degree of effort or personal cost.

For example, if Mary enacts a rude or hostile behavior, John's immediate impulse may be to behave rudely in return. John may feel demeaned, wish to defend his dignity, or seek to gain some measure of revenge. The impulse to reciprocate negativity—to defend oneself in the face of attack—appears to be quite strong (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). However, a retaliative act on John's part is likely to escalate conflict, producing a hostile interaction that could harm his relationship. Thus, John's direct, self-interested impulses are at odds with the interests of his relationship. From a strictly personal point of view, the loss of pride John would endure if he were to quietly suffer

Mary's insult may seem more unpleasant than the unpleasantness associated with retaliating, further irritating Mary, and harming their relationship. If John is to behave in such a manner as to benefit his relationship, he must swallow his pride, control his impulse toward retaliation, and find it in himself to behave in a conciliatory manner. Thus, interdependence dilemmas require individuals to reveal their priorities; such situations provide us with opportunities to demonstrate whether our motives are self-oriented or relationship-oriented.

Adaptation to Interdependence Dilemmas

Transformation of Motivation. The interdependence theory distinction between the given situation and the effective situation provides a framework for understanding what leads some partners to "behave well" in interdependence dilemmas, enduring cost or exerting effort to ensure the well-being of their relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). As illustrated in Fig. 5.1, the *given situation* refers to each partner's immediate well-being in a specific situation, describing what we assume to be each person's gut-level, self-centered preferences (e.g., the impulse to retaliate when Mary behaves in a hostile manner). Hedonistic motivation is the de-

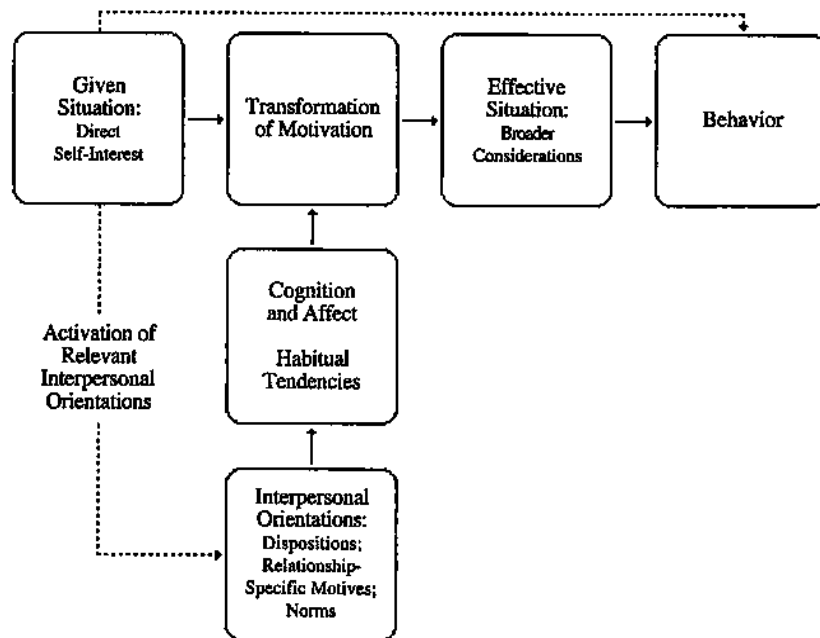


FIG. 5.1. Transformation of motivation.

fault option in interaction. We assume that, at some level, individuals recognize that which is in their self-interest, and we assume that departures from this default baseline to some degree are costly or effortful (and therefore meaningful).

It should be clear that we do not always pursue our self-oriented given preferences. (Indeed, we could not sustain ongoing relationships if we were consistently governed by our default, hedonistic impulses.) Frequently behavior is shaped by broader concerns, including strategic considerations, long-term goals, or desire to promote both one's own and a partner's well-being. Frequently we act on the basis of desire to create or sustain ongoing involvements. Movement away from given preferences results from transformation of motivation—a process that leads individuals to relinquish hedonistic preferences based on immediate self-interest and instead act on the basis of broader considerations. The effective situation describes the modified preferences that are assumed to result from the transformation process—reconceptualized, effective preferences guide behavior (e.g., accommodating rather than retaliating when Mary behaves rudely).

The transformation process may produce any of a variety of goals (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; McClintock, 1972). In well-functioning relationships, the transformation process frequently yields prorelationship motives, producing a shift from desire to maximize one's immediate self-interest (MaxOwn) toward prorelationship orientations such as desire to maximize the partner's interests (MaxOther) or joint interests (MaxJoint). At the same time, antirelationship transformation is also possible (e.g., desire to maximize the difference between one's own and the partner's interests [MaxRel]).

In light of the variety of transformational tendencies that partners might display in the context of a specific interaction, interdependence dilemmas can be construed as diagnostic situations (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Interdependence dilemmas are diagnostic in the sense that behavior in such situations is revealing of the individual's broader goals, values, and motives. Does John resolve a specific dilemma by pursuing his immediate self-interest, or does he set aside self-interest for the good of the relationship? If John reacts to Mary's rudeness by swallowing his pride and accommodating, such a departure from his gut-level self-interest demonstrates his benevolent feelings for Mary and his constructive goals for their relationship.

Stable Transformational Tendencies and Interpersonal Orientations. Relatively stable transformational tendencies are argued to emerge as a result of adaptation to ongoing circumstances of interdependence. How

so? Specific interdependence dilemmas initially are experienced as unique problems or opportunities. Reactions to novel situations sometimes rest on conscious thought. John may deliberately review his behavioral options, take account of his feelings for Mary and his goals for their future, and actively decide whether to behave selfishly or benevolently ("Mary hurt me, but I'm concerned about our future, so I'll inhibit my impulse to be hostile"). Alternatively, reactions may involve little conscious thought. John may react impulsively, automatically experiencing sympathy and reacting in a benevolent manner. In either event, the unique dilemma has been dealt with and experience is acquired.

Over time, some types of interdependence dilemmas will be experienced repeatedly. Through the process of adaptation, we develop habitual tendencies to react to specific patterns in specific ways—that is, we develop habitual transformational tendencies (Kelley, 1983b). At critical choice points, we may continue to engage in active decision making, but just as often transformation may be guided by habit. There are three mechanisms by which experience shapes habits: (a) *retroactive selection* (selective reinforcement)—as a consequence of behaving in a specific manner in a given interaction, certain preferences, motives, and behaviors are rewarded (or punished); (b) *preemptive selection* (selective instigation)—others enact behaviors that elicit (or inhibit) specific preferences, motives, and behaviors; and (c) *situation selection* (manipulation of interaction situations)—prior actions bring about situations in which specific preferences, motives, and behaviors become more (or less) probable.

Habitual transformational tendencies are guided by *interpersonal orientations*, defined as relatively stable pattern-contingent and partner-contingent solutions to specific interdependence patterns (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996). That is, tendencies toward one type of transformation rather than another are guided by the habitual solutions we acquire over the course of adaptation to a variety of interdependence situations. These solutions frequently are specific to a particular type of interdependence situation and frequently are specific to a particular interaction partner. Interpersonal orientations may be embodied in: (a) personal dispositions, or actor-specific inclinations to respond to particular interdependence situations in a specific manner across numerous interaction partners (e.g., secure attachment, dispositional competitiveness); (b) relationship-specific motives or dyad-specific inclinations to respond to particular interdependence situations in a specific manner (e.g., commitment, trust); and (c) social norms or group-based inclinations to respond to particular interdependence situations in a specific manner, either across numerous interaction partners or within the context of a given relationship (e.g., the Golden Rule, the social contract).

The Transformation Process. How does transformation of motivation come about? Human intelligence is highly interpersonal: We can identify key features of interactions insofar as such features are relevant to personal well-being, recognizing that some interaction situations resemble previously encountered situations. That is, we respond to specific interdependence dilemmas as instances of general patterns rather than perceiving and responding to each situation *de novo* (Kelley, 1984). Thus, as represented in Fig. 5.1, the transformation process begins when the individual recognizes the given situation as either a novel situation or as a situation similar to previous interactions sharing the same general pattern.

If the pattern of the given situation is unfamiliar, the individual may actively consider its structure and implications; if the pattern is familiar, its structure and implications may be readily apparent. The pattern perceived to exist in the given situation may be one for which the solution rests on broader considerations (i.e., interpersonal orientations) or may be one for which no broader considerations are relevant. If the pattern is one for which no broader considerations are relevant, the individual will simply act on the basis of immediate self-interest (MaxOwn). No transformation occurs, and the effective situation is equivalent to the given situation—that is, the pattern of outcomes in the given situation governs overt behavior.

However, if the given pattern is more complex, any of a variety of interpersonal orientations may be activated. The dispositions, motives, or norms that are activated influence motivation via either (a) cognitively or affectively mediated transformation, or (b) automatic transformation. In the mediated case, orientations color meaning analysis or the cognitions and affective responses that accompany interaction (Kelley, 1979, 1984). For example, if John is strongly committed, rather than experiencing indignation when Mary behaves rudely, he may feel concerned about Mary's well-being and form benign interpretations of her actions. These thoughts and feelings lead him to place high value on both his own and Mary's well-being, yielding prorelationship motives. Alternatively, the individual may automatically exhibit prorelationship transformation with little or no internal mediation. For example, if John and Mary have a history of commitment and have encountered many noncorrespondent interactions, John may automatically exhibit concern for Mary's well-being and prorelationship transformation may come about in a rather habitual and unmediated manner.

Whether the transformation process is mediated by meaning analysis or comes about automatically, the process produces a shift in motivation from the pursuit of direct self-interest to an alternative motive. This shift yields an effective situation that reflects the modified preferences dictated by the governing interpersonal orientation. For example, in a given situa-

tion involving noncorrespondent preferences, John's strong commitment will yield a set of effective preferences in which prorelationship behavior takes on greater value. As a consequence, John will behave in a constructive and benevolent manner.

Transformation of motivation reflects the influence of important social psychological causes of behavior. If we conceptualize human behavior in terms of person-by-situation interactions, the transformation process is the juncture at which the "rubber meets the road" — the juncture at which the person meets the situation. Transformation describes the process during which (a) characteristics of a specific person (a given individual's dispositions, relationship-specific motives, and norms) combine with (b) characteristics of a specific situation (properties of a given situation, characterized in terms of that which is dictated by immediate self-interest), to yield (c) individual action. Accordingly, to understand behavior in interdependence dilemmas, it becomes important to ask what it is that leads some individuals to react on the basis of immediate self-interest (the situation *per se*), whereas other individuals exhibit prorelationship transformation and behavior. In the following section, we propose that, among the several interpersonal orientations that affect the transformation process, commitment to a relationship plays a key role in inducing prorelationship motivation.

DEPENDENCE, COMMITMENT, AND PERSISTENCE

Interdependence theory suggests that dependence is a fundamental property of relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). *Dependence level* describes the degree to which an individual needs his or her relationship or the extent to which the individual's personal well-being is influenced by involvement in the relationship. What are the primary bases of dependence, and what are its consequences? In the following section, we describe the investment model of commitment processes.

Bases of Dependence

Consistent with interdependence theory tenets, and as illustrated in Fig. 5.2, we suggest that individuals become increasingly dependent on their relationships to the degree that: (a) satisfaction level is high, or the relationship fulfills the individual's most important needs (e.g., needs for intimacy, companionship, sexuality); (b) quality of alternatives is poor, or the individual's most important needs could not be fulfilled independent of the relationship (e.g., in alternative romantic involvements, through independent action, by friends or kin); and (c) investment size is high, or many

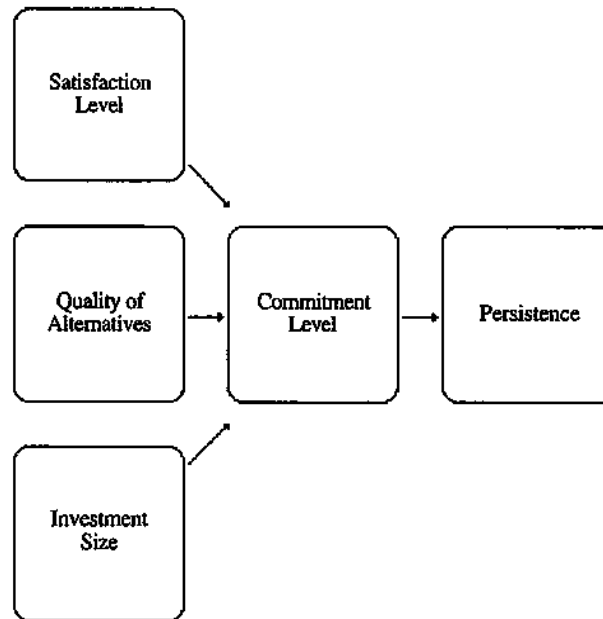


FIG. 5.2. Dependence, commitment, and persistence.

important resources have become attached to the relationship, including resources that would be lost or decline in value if the relationship were to end (e.g., time and effort, material possessions, shared friendship network; Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994).

What Is Commitment?

Consistent with other major models of the commitment process (cf. M. Johnson, 1991; Levinger, 1979), the investment model suggests that as individuals become dependent on their relationships they develop increasingly strong commitment (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult et al., 1994). *Commitment level* is defined in terms of three interrelated components, including conative, affective, and cognitive properties. The conative component of commitment is intent to persist—with increasing dependence, we become intrinsically motivated to persist with our partners. The affective component is psychological attachment—with increasing dependence, we come to experience life in dyadic terms, such that our emotional well-being is influenced by our partners and relationships. The cognitive component is long-term orientation—with increasing dependence, we increasingly envision ourselves as involved in our relationships for the

foreseeable future, considering the implications of current action for future outcomes.

Commitment, Persistence, and Adjustment

Much of the existing literature regarding close involvement implicitly or explicitly assumes that individuals persist because they are satisfied with their relationships (for a review of the literature, see Berscheid & Reis, 1998). In contrast, the investment model suggests that feeling good—liking, attraction, satisfaction, and the like—is not sufficient to predict persistence and willingness to go the extra mile on behalf of a relationship. Granted, satisfaction level is one basis for dependence. However, satisfaction alone is not sufficient to induce strong dependence or commitment. Moreover, the psychological experience of commitment reflects more than the bases of dependence out of which it arises. Dependence is a fundamental property of relationships—a structural property describing the additive effects of wanting to persist (feeling satisfied), needing to persist (having high investments), and having no choice but to persist (possessing poor alternatives). In contrast, commitment can be construed as the sense of allegiance that is established with regard to the source of one's dependence. Because John is dependent on his relationship with Mary, John develops an inclination to persist with Mary, he comes to think of himself as part of JohnandMary, and he considers the broader implications of his actions—implications extending beyond his immediate self-interest, including effects on the relationship next week, next month, and next year.

The empirical literature provides consistent support for investment model claims, demonstrating that: (a) commitment is positively associated with satisfaction and investment size and negatively associated with quality of alternatives; (b) each of these variables contributes unique variance to predicting commitment; (c) compared with less committed individuals, highly committed individuals are substantially more likely to persist in their relationships; and (d) commitment is the most direct and powerful predictor of persistence, partially or wholly mediating the effects of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments on decisions to remain in versus end a relationship. Such findings have been observed in several cultures (e.g., the United States, the Netherlands, Taiwan), in research employing diverse methods, and a variety of participant populations (e.g., marital and nonmarital relationships, heterosexual and gay or lesbian relationships, abusive relationships; e.g., Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Feinlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990; Kurdek, 1993; Lin & Rusbult, 1995; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult & Martz, 1995; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; Simpson, 1987; South & Lloyd, 1995; Van Lange et al., 1997). For example,

compelling support for the investment model was observed in a 15-year longitudinal test of the investment model—an empirical test demonstrating that (a) the investment model predicts persistence in relationships over a 15-year time period; and (b) satisfaction, alternatives, and investments account for substantial variance in strength of commitment (Bui, Peplau, & Hill, 1996).

MAINTENANCE MECHANISMS IN ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to promoting persistence, we suggest that strong commitment encourages a variety of *relationship maintenance mechanisms*, defined as the specific means by which partners manage to sustain long-term, well-functioning relationships. Maintenance acts serve a positive function for relationships, helping couples persist despite threats such as uncertainty, noncorrespondent outcomes, and tempting alternatives. At the same time, maintenance acts are not necessarily unambiguously positive for individuals—particularly in terms of the individual's immediate self-interest—in that they involve the enactment of otherwise undesirable behaviors, the modification of existing cognitive representations, or other forms of cost or effort. Some maintenance acts involve trivial inconvenience, whereas others entail considerable cost. Therefore, it is useful to construe maintenance mechanisms as solutions to problematic situations—solutions that rest on prorelationship transformation.

Why should commitment promote prorelationship motives and behavior? As noted earlier, committed individuals experience high satisfaction, perceive their alternatives to be poor, and have invested heavily. They are also psychologically attached to their relationships and think about their relationships over the long run rather than in the here and now. The implications of this combination of conditions should be clear: Committed individuals have a considerable stake in their relationships and wish to ensure that they persist and exhibit good adjustment. If John is strongly committed to his relationship, he has a variety of reasons to put the interests of the relationship before his own needs on those occasions when it is necessary to do so. First, because John is dependent, he literally needs his relationship; the more he stands to lose, the more effort he is likely to exert to hold onto what he has got (cf. Holmes, 1981). Second, because John is oriented toward long-term outcomes, he recognizes that it is in his long-term interest to develop patterns of reciprocal prorelationship behavior. Also the costs of foregoing self-interest are aggregated over a longer time perspective and in light of the partner's reciprocal departures from self-interest (cf. Kelley, 1983a). Third, because John is psychologically attached to his relationship, he may come to experience himself and Mary as *merged* (i.e.,

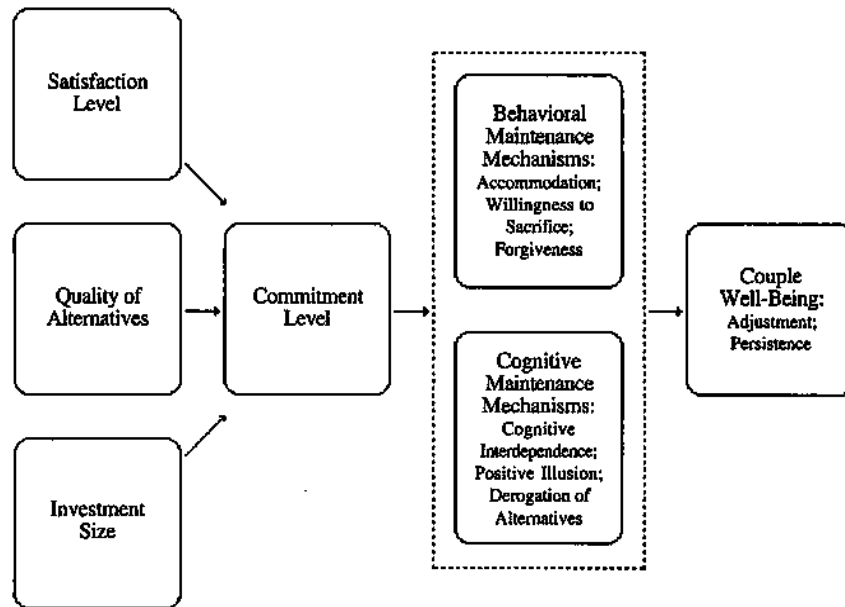


FIG. 5.3. Commitment and relationship maintenance mechanisms.

the line separating self-interest from partner interests may become blurred), such that departures from self-interest benefiting Mary may not be experienced as costly (cf. Aron & Aron, 1997). Fourth, strong commitment may yield collectivistic orientation, including inclinations to respond to Mary's needs in a relatively unconditional manner—John may endure cost and exert effort without calculating what he will receive in return (cf. Clark & Mills, 1979).

Over the past decade, we have identified a handful of mechanisms by which committed individuals sustain long-term involvements; additional mechanisms are likely to be identified in the future. In the following section, and as illustrated in Fig. 5.3, we review (a) behavioral maintenance acts, which involve shifts in behavior toward the goal of enhancing couple well-being; and (b) cognitive maintenance acts, which involve cognitive restructuring toward the goal of enhancing couple well-being.

Behavioral Maintenance Mechanisms

As noted earlier, the real test of a relationship arises when circumstances of interdependence are problematic—when the well-being of one or both partners is incompatible with the well-being of the relationship. Behavioral maintenance mechanisms are the positive, preresolution acts that

close partners exhibit in problematic interdependence dilemmas of this sort. That is, behavioral maintenance acts involve shifts in behavior toward the goal of enhancing couple well-being.

Accommodative Behavior. Work regarding accommodative behavior emerged out of research using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology to examine responses to dissatisfaction in everyday interaction (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982). This typology identifies four possible reactions to accommodative dilemmas—responses that differ in terms of constructiveness versus destructiveness and activity versus passivity. Exit reactions are actively destructive (e.g., screaming at the partner), voice reactions are actively constructive (e.g., suggesting that the partners discuss matters), loyalty reactions are passively constructive (e.g., patiently waiting for improvement), and neglect reactions are passively destructive (e.g., giving one's partner the "cold shoulder"). Research regarding the functional value of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect behaviors reveals support for a *good manners* model of conflicted interaction: It is less important that partners enact constructive behaviors than that they *not* enact destructive behaviors because the harmful effects of negative acts are substantially stronger than the beneficial effects of positive acts (e.g., Drigotas, Whitney, & Rusbult, 1995; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986).

Unfortunately, it is nearly inevitable that, at some point, one or both partners will engage in destructive acts. *Accommodation* describes the willingness, when a partner enacts a potentially destructive behavior, to (a) inhibit the impulse to react destructively in turn, and (b) instead react in a constructive manner (Rusbult et al., 1991). (Operationally, accommodation describes the willingness, when a partner enacts exit or neglect behaviors, to inhibit the impulse toward reciprocal exit and neglect, instead enacting voice or loyalty behaviors.) For example, after a bad day at work, Mary may snap at John with no provocation. John's gut-level response may be to snap back. Based on the clinical literature regarding negative reciprocity, it is apparent that John's reaction will yield escalating hostility (for reviews of the literature, see Gottman, 1994; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979): Mary says something thoughtless, John reacts with a snide comment, Mary makes a nasty retort, and so on. Resolving such a chain of increasingly hostile interaction requires the ability to avoid destructive reciprocity, moving toward reconciliation rather than escalation. To reduce tension and soothe heated feelings, John must inhibit the impulse to fight fire with fire, instead reacting in a constructive manner. For example, John might ask Mary how her day went or might simply ignore the incident.

Does accommodation indeed result from prorelationship transformation? Is destructive reciprocity the impulsive reaction to accommodative

dilemmas? Does accommodation represent a departure from the individual's immediate, gut-level impulses? In short, yes. Prior research has demonstrated that when confronted with accommodative dilemmas, individuals given plentiful response time (time for transformation) exhibit greater inclinations to accommodate than do those given limited response time (no time for transformation; Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Also, in reacting to accommodative dilemmas, compared with the behaviors individuals consider enacting (given preferences), the behaviors they actually enact (effective preferences) are considerably more constructive and less destructive (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). Moreover, compared with individuals' inclinations under conditions of reduced social concern (eliminating concern for the partner's well-being, broader social norms, and the like; given preferences), preferences under conditions of normal social concern (effective preferences) are considerably more constructive and less destructive (Rusbult et al., 1991).

Does strong commitment motivate accommodative behavior? Several cross-sectional survey studies of dating partners—along with a longitudinal study of marital relationships—have revealed that self-reported accommodation is more likely among individuals with strong commitment (Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991). Accommodation is positively associated with satisfaction level, negatively associated with quality of alternatives, and positively associated with investment size. Also, the associations of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments with accommodation are largely accounted for by the associations of these variables with commitment (i.e., commitment largely mediates the association of the bases of dependence with accommodation). Also, self-report measures of accommodation appear to be reasonably valid in that individuals' self-reports of accommodation are associated with (a) partners' descriptions of the individual's accommodative acts, and (b) a variety of behavioral measures of accommodation, including measures obtained from videotaped recordings of partners' conflicted interactions (Rusbult, Bissonnette et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., 1991).

Of course, commitment is not the only variable that promotes inclinations to accommodate rather than retaliate when a partner behaves badly. Prior research has demonstrated that individuals are more likely to accommodate to the degree that they exhibit secure attachment style, are more psychologically feminine, and engage in partner perspective-taking (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; Gaines et al., 1997; Kilpatrick, Bissonnette, & Rusbult, 2000; Rusbult et al., 1991; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1995). Also, the inclination to accommodate is predictable based on the nature of the internal events accompanying accommodative dilemmas. For example, the impact of commitment on accommodation has been shown to be mediated by internal events such as (a) benevolent meaning analysis, or the

tendency to experience benign emotions and develop benevolent interpretations of the partner's actions during the course of accommodative dilemmas (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998); and (b) empathic accuracy, or the tendency to accurately perceive the partner's cognitions and affect during the course of conflicted interaction (Kilpatrick et al., 2000).

Given that accommodation is a costly and effortful departure from immediate self-interest, it is important to ask whether accommodation is truly beneficial. If John turns the other cheek every time Mary behaves badly, is their relationship benefited? Will Mary simply learn that she can get away with outrageous behavior? One way to answer these questions is to examine the association of accommodation with quality of couple functioning. High levels of accommodation consistently have been shown to be associated with indexes of couple well-being, including persistence and dyadic adjustment (Rusbult, Bissonnette et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., 1986, 1991). At the same time, it appears that couple functioning is greatest in relationships exhibiting mutually high levels of accommodation—that is, couple well-being is enhanced when partners take turns exhibiting strong and equal inclinations to behave constructively in accommodative dilemmas (Rusbult et al., 1991). Thus, although accommodation involves personal cost, the tendency of committed individuals to accommodate clearly is beneficial to ongoing relationships.

Willingness to Sacrifice. Although partners in ongoing relationships may experience many interactions in which their preferences are compatible, it is inevitable that, at some time, they will be forced to deal with noncorrespondent situations. For example, on Friday night, John may wish to attend a hockey game, whereas Mary would rather spend the evening at home. John may receive a desirable job offer in Chicago, whereas Mary's most desirable offer may be in New York. When partners encounter such noncorrespondent situations, it becomes necessary that one or both persons exhibit *willingness to sacrifice*, defined as the tendency to forego immediate self-interest to promote the well-being of the partner and relationship (Van Lange et al., 1997). Sacrifice may entail foregoing behaviors that otherwise would be desirable (passive sacrifice), enacting behaviors that otherwise would not be desirable (active sacrifice), or both. Acts of sacrifice may be minor and transitory (e.g., John may attend an opera that Mary wants to see) or substantial and lasting (e.g., John may agree to live in an undesirable locale for the sake of Mary's career).

Noncorrespondent situations are quite common, yet such situations are potentially disruptive to a relationship—partners may expend a good deal of energy working to resolve conflicts of interest, they may become aggravated at one another's differing preferences, and they may feel hurt when one or both partners ignore the other's preferences in the pursuit of

self-interest. Thus, there is reason to wonder whether commitment indeed promotes willingness to sacrifice and whether the willingness to do so is beneficial to relationships.

We have examined willingness to sacrifice in six studies that used diverse methods, employed both self-report and behavioral measures, and examined both dating relationships and marital relationships (Van Lange et al., 1997). This research revealed that (a) commitment is positively associated with willingness to sacrifice; (b) willingness to sacrifice is greater among individuals who exhibit high satisfaction, poor alternatives, and high investments; and (c) the associations of satisfaction, alternatives, and investments with willingness to sacrifice are largely accounted for by the associations of these variables with commitment (i.e., commitment largely mediates the association of the bases of dependence with sacrifice). Also, willingness to sacrifice is positively associated with dyadic adjustment and probability of persisting, and sacrifice partially mediates the association of commitment with adjustment—that is, the enhanced adjustment characterizing committed couples is partially attributable to the fact that committed partners exhibit greater willingness to sacrifice and therefore enjoy greater adjustment. Thus, although sacrificial behavior necessitates foregoing immediate self-interest, the willingness of committed individuals to sacrifice—when it becomes necessary to do so—yields clear benefits in ongoing relationships.

Forgiveness of Betrayal. One of the most serious threats to a relationship involves the experience of betrayal or the violation of an implicit or explicit relationship-relevant norm. How do betrayal incidents differ from accommodative dilemmas and dilemmas involving sacrifice? Whereas dilemmas involving sacrifice arise when partners' preferences are incompatible (through no necessary fault of either person), and whereas accommodative dilemmas are instigated when a partner enacts a potentially destructive behavior, dilemmas relevant to forgiveness arise when a partner breaks the rules governing the relationship. Because acts of betrayal violate relationship-relevant norms, such incidents possess a uniquely moral character. It is the moral dimension of betrayal that gives such incidents their power, producing righteous indignation and hostile behavioral tendencies.

Betrayal incidents vary in severity (telling a white lie vs. sexual infidelity), but to a greater or lesser degree such incidents yield a signature constellation of negative feelings, thoughts, and behavioral tendencies (for a review of the literature, see McCullough, Sandage, & Worthington, 1997). Victims of betrayal frequently react with anger, confusion, and demands for atonement. Perpetrators often experience guilt or shame and may show remorse or apologize for the harm they have caused. If victims con-

tinue to express outrage, perpetrators may become angry and may seek to defend themselves or minimize the severity of the betrayal. Thus, the aftermath of betrayal is complex, and such incidents are difficult to resolve.

Recovery from betrayal rests on *forgiveness*, defined as the victim's willingness to forego desire for retribution and demands for atonement, instead reacting in a less judgmental, more constructive manner. Complete forgiveness may be difficult, in that it rests on the resumption of prebetrayal patterns of interaction—the victim no longer obsessively reviews the betrayal, reminds the perpetrator of the incident, demands apology, or exhibits any residue of the incident. In the case of complete forgiveness, the victim experiences a *change of heart* and fully relegates the incident to the past. Consistent with researchers operating in the clinical tradition, we assume that it may be useful to distinguish between forgiveness (an individual act) and reconciliation (a joint act; Enright & the Human Development Study Group, 1996). For example, although John may forgive Mary for a heinous act of betrayal, he may find that he cannot find his way to reconciliation with her.

Does forgiveness result from prorelationship transformation—is vengeance indeed the impulsive reaction to betrayal incidents, and does forgiveness represent a departure from the individual's immediate, gut-level impulses? Following the research strategy reviewed earlier for accommodation, we have found that when confronted with betrayal incidents, individuals given plentiful response time (time for transformation) exhibit greater inclinations toward forgiveness than do those given limited response time (no time for transformation; Rusbult, Davis, Finkel, Hannon, & Olsen, 2000). Also, when describing reactions to betrayal incidents, the responses people consider enacting (given preferences) are considerably more vengeful and less forgiving than the responses they actually enact (effective preferences; Rusbult, Davis et al., 2000). Thus, it is by no means easy for the victims of betrayal to forgive their partners.

We anticipated that forgiveness of betrayal would be more probable to the extent that individuals are more highly committed. We conducted four studies to test this prediction: (a) a cross-sectional survey study examining betrayal incidents in ongoing relationships; (b) a diary study examining everyday betrayal incidents occurring over the course of a 2-week period; (c) an experiment in which we manipulated commitment level in interactions between strangers, examining reactions to betrayal in the context of an experimental game; and (d) a priming experiment in which we manipulated commitment by temporarily activating low versus high commitment (Rusbult, Finkel, Hannon, Kumashiro, & Childs, 2000). Consistent with expectations, the four studies revealed good evidence that victims of betrayal are more forgiving to the degree that they are more committed to their partners; the commitment–forgiveness associa-

tion is evident even controlling for the recency and severity of betrayal. Thus—and parallel to prorelationship acts such as accommodation and willingness to sacrifice—although forgiveness is a complex phenomenon that in many respects defies individuals' gut-level impulses, forgiveness arguably is beneficial to ongoing relationships.

Cognitive Maintenance Mechanisms

It is difficult to consistently feel thankful and sustain conviction in the desirability of one's relationship. Interdependence dilemmas not only pit individual interests against the interests of the relationship, but also threaten the stability of an involvement, creating uncertainty and challenging partners' convictions. Cognitive maintenance mechanisms involve mental restructuring toward the goal of enhancing couple well-being. Prior to discussing these mechanisms, it is important to note that, although individuals may sometimes consciously and deliberately engage in such activities, cognitive maintenance acts typically are relatively automatic products of strong commitment.

Cognitive Interdependence. Prior research has demonstrated that, in perceiving and recalling information about other individuals, we tend to spontaneously categorize information using relationship categories (Sedikides, Olsen, & Reis, 1993). In research designed to determine whether involvement in a relationship produces parallel shifts in cognitions regarding the self, we have found that strong commitment produces a prorelationship restructuring of the actor's representation of self. Cognitive interdependence involves movement from a largely individual-based internal representation of the self to a collective representation of self and partner. For example, compared with less committed individuals, highly committed individuals exhibit a greater rate of plural pronoun usage (*we, us, our* rather than *I, me, mine*; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). In addition, compared with less committed individuals, highly committed individuals perceive greater overlap between the self and the partner and describe their relationships as more central in bringing meaning to life. These constructs exist in a congenial, mutually sustaining pattern—strong commitment predicts increases over time in cognitive interdependence, and strong cognitive interdependence predicts increases over time in commitment. Such a collectively defined representation of the self presumably promotes prorelationship transformation. For example, MaxJoint transformation may be more probable to the extent that pluralistic, we-based thoughts are readily available. Thus, although cognitive interdependence involves some loss of unique, individual identity, this type of cognitive restructuring arguably is beneficial to relationships.

Positive Illusion. Over time in a relationship, we tend to develop idealized beliefs regarding our partners and relationships, constructing storylike narratives and cognitive representations that diffuse feelings of uncertainty and dampen doubts regarding our relationships. We sustain idealized beliefs via several mechanisms, including: (a) cognitive filters, whereby we screen out negative information regarding our own relationships; (b) downward social comparison, whereby we compare our relationships to other relationships that are less well-off; and (c) dimensional comparison, whereby we evaluate our own relationships in comparison to other relationships with regard to dimensions on which our relationships truly do excel (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995).

Individuals sustain idealized beliefs in part by translating their partners' faults into virtues, reinterpreting qualities that might otherwise be regarded in a negative light ("he slurps coffee in an adorable way"; Murray & Holmes, 1993). Interestingly, actors possess more positive beliefs regarding their partners than their partners hold regarding themselves. Also, idealized beliefs represent more than simple in-the-head illusion, in that the tendency to idealize one's partner is associated with two sorts of positive consequence: (a) increases over time in love, satisfaction, and trust, as well as decreases over time in uncertainty and conflict; and (b) increases over time in the partner's positive regard for self (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b).

The inclination to develop idealized beliefs in response to psychological threat appears to be particularly characteristic of individuals with high self-esteem (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth, 1998). For example, when individuals with high self-esteem are confronted with a threat to their feelings of self-worth (e.g., guilt about a transgression), they bring to mind numerous thoughts emphasizing the partner's acceptance of the self, deflecting potentially damaging self-doubts. In contrast, when individuals with low self-esteem are confronted with such a threat, they respond with increased uncertainty regarding the partner's acceptance of the self, which in turn leads them to perceive the partner in a less positive light.

Prior research has also examined social comparison of one's own to others' relationships. Research regarding perceived superiority reveals that people tend to: (a) hold a greater number of positive thoughts about their own relationships than other relationships; and (b) hold fewer negative thoughts about their own than other relationships (Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, in press; Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995). We not only exhibit: (a) *perceived superiority*—perceiving a greater number of positive attributes in our own relationships than in others' relationships; but also (b) *excessive optimism*—perceiving that our relationships have rosier futures than other relationships; and (c) *unrealistic per-*

ceptions of control—perceiving that we possess greater control over our relationships than others do (Martz, Verette, Arriaga, Slovik, Cox, & Rusbult, 1998).

The tendency toward positive illusion is more pronounced among people who are highly committed (Martz et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., in press). Also, positive illusion appears to be a motivated phenomenon. For example, emotionally threatening manipulations (e.g., “college students’ relationships exhibit poor adjustment”) yield enhanced levels of perceived superiority, suggesting that committed individuals exhibit this tendency in part because they “need to do so” — because doing so reduces anxiety and doubt (Murray & Holmes, 1993; Rusbult et al., in press). Moreover, the inclination toward positive illusion is driven more by commitment to a relationship than by self-esteem — that is, in the relationships context, positive illusion is a relationship-driven phenomenon, not simply another mechanism by which individuals sustain positive self-regard (Martz et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., in press). Finally, positive illusion is positively associated with dyadic adjustment and probability of persistence (Martz et al., 1998; Rusbult et al., in press).

Derogation of Tempting Alternatives. Tempting alternatives may threaten ongoing relationships. How do we deal with such threats? First, alternative partners may become more scarce over the course of an ongoing relationship. Potentially tempting alternatives may “take themselves out of the running” when they know that an individual is committed, or committed individuals may drive away alternatives by displaying conspicuous symbols of their involvement (e.g., a wedding ring; cf. Kelley, 1983a). At the same time, alternatives typically do not completely disappear — attractive alternatives continue to represent a threat to many relationships.

Research regarding derogation of alternatives reveals that involved individuals cognitively disparage alternative partners — for example, they subtly minimize alternative partners’ abilities or attributes (“I bet he has no sense of humor”). The tendency to derogate alternatives is greater among highly committed individuals (D. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Simpson, Gangestad, & Lerma, 1990), as is the tendency to exhibit defensive perceptual maneuvers — compared with less committed people, those with high commitment spend less time attending to tempting alternatives (Miller, 1997).

Existing evidence suggests that, at least in part, derogation of alternatives is a motivated phenomenon — that is, committed individuals derogate alternatives at least in part because they need to do so. For example, commitment interacts with threat in promoting derogation — the tendency of committed individuals to derogate alternatives is greater when the al-

ternative is more threatening or more attractive and readily available (D. Johnson & Rusbult, 1989). Although derogation of alternatives involves some opportunity loss, this type of mental restructuring would appear to have considerable adaptive value in a committed relationship.

MUTUAL CYCLICAL GROWTH IN ONGOING RELATIONSHIPS

Given that commitment plays a central role in relationships, it would be adaptive for partners to implicitly or explicitly attend to one another's commitment levels. Why so? First, commitment and dependence make individuals vulnerable; such vulnerability is reduced when the partner is equally vulnerable (equal vulnerability represents balance of power; Drigotas, Rusbult, & Verette, 1999). Second, couple well-being has been shown to rest on both level of commitment and mutuality of commitment (Drigotas et al., 1999). Third, maintenance acts follow the principle of reciprocity – we are more willing to enact prorelationship behaviors to the degree that the partner is expected to do so (Van Lange et al., 1997). To the extent that achieving and sustaining equal dependence, mutual commitment, and reciprocity of prorelationship acts rest on knowledge of a partner's commitment, an implicit gauge of the partner's commitment would seem to have considerable functional value. We suggest that relationship-specific trust is such a gauge.

Most theory and research concerning trust has examined this phenomenon as a relatively enduring personal disposition that is assumed to yield considerable stability in cognition, affect, and behavior across a variety of situations and across a variety of interaction partners. For example, Rotter (1980) described trust as a personality trait, and attachment theory emphasizes the ways in which early attachment experiences influence mental models of attachment, which in turn shape later inclinations to trust close partners (for a review of this literature, see Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

In the present context, it is suitable to describe trust as an interpersonal phenomenon, construing trust not as a stable trait but as a quality that is specific to a particular relationship with a particular partner. Toward this goal, Holmes and his colleagues have conceptualized trust as a relationship-specific phenomenon, defining *trust level* as the expectation that a given partner can be relied on to behave in a benevolent manner and be responsive to one's needs (Holmes, 1989; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Trust is said to include three components (Holmes & Rempel, 1989): (a) predictability, or belief that the partner's behavior is consistent; (b) dependability, or belief that the partner can be counted on to be honest, reliable, and benevolent; and (c) faith, or conviction that the partner is intrin-

sically motivated to be responsive and caring—belief that the partner's motives go beyond instrumental bases for benevolence.

How do we develop conviction that our partners are predictable and dependable; how do we develop faith that our partners consistently will be responsive to our needs? Over the course of extended involvement, partners inevitably confront situations in which personal interests are pitted against the interests of the relationship—that is, individuals encounter the sorts of interdependence dilemmas described earlier. In such situations, individuals implicitly make a choice: Should I do what's good for me, or should I put my partner's needs before my own? Holmes and Rempel (1989) suggested that the emergence of trust rests on the manner in which individuals are perceived to behave during such episodes. Episodes of this sort are diagnostic, in that behavior in such situations is diagnostic of the individual's broader goals, values, and motives.

Commitment-inspired maintenance acts are diagnostic of prorelationship orientation. Accommodation and sacrifice provide particularly unambiguous evidence of benevolent motives, in that when individuals accommodate rather than retaliate—and when they sacrifice otherwise desirable activities to solve problems of noncorrespondence—they demonstrate that they are willing to behave in a generous and giving manner. To some extent, cognitive maintenance tendencies may provide parallel evidence, especially insofar as such tendencies involve exceptional effort or cost. If it is true that the benevolent acts promoted by commitment provide evidence regarding strength of prorelationship orientation, then trust can be construed as a mirror reflecting the strength of a partner's commitment.

As partners develop increased trust in one another, they are likely to become increasingly dependent on one another—that is, they are likely to become increasingly satisfied, increasingly willing to forego alternatives, and increasingly willing to invest in the relationship (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). As John becomes confident that Mary will be responsive to his needs, he is likely to experience enhanced satisfaction with their relationship. Moreover, as John's trust grows, he should be more willing to make himself vulnerable by cognitively or behaviorally driving away alternatives, and he should be more willing to throw in his lot with Mary by investing in their relationship, emotionally or behaviorally. Such increased dependence will yield strengthened commitment, which in turn should produce increased willingness to engage in generous, prorelationship acts.

As illustrated in Fig. 5.4, we have outlined a model of mutual cyclical growth—a congenial pattern of adaptation to evolving conditions of interdependence in which changes in each person's actions and motives yield complementary changes in the partner. The results of two longitudinal studies—one exploring dating relationships and one exploring marital relationships—reveal good support for these claims (Wieselquist, Rusbult,

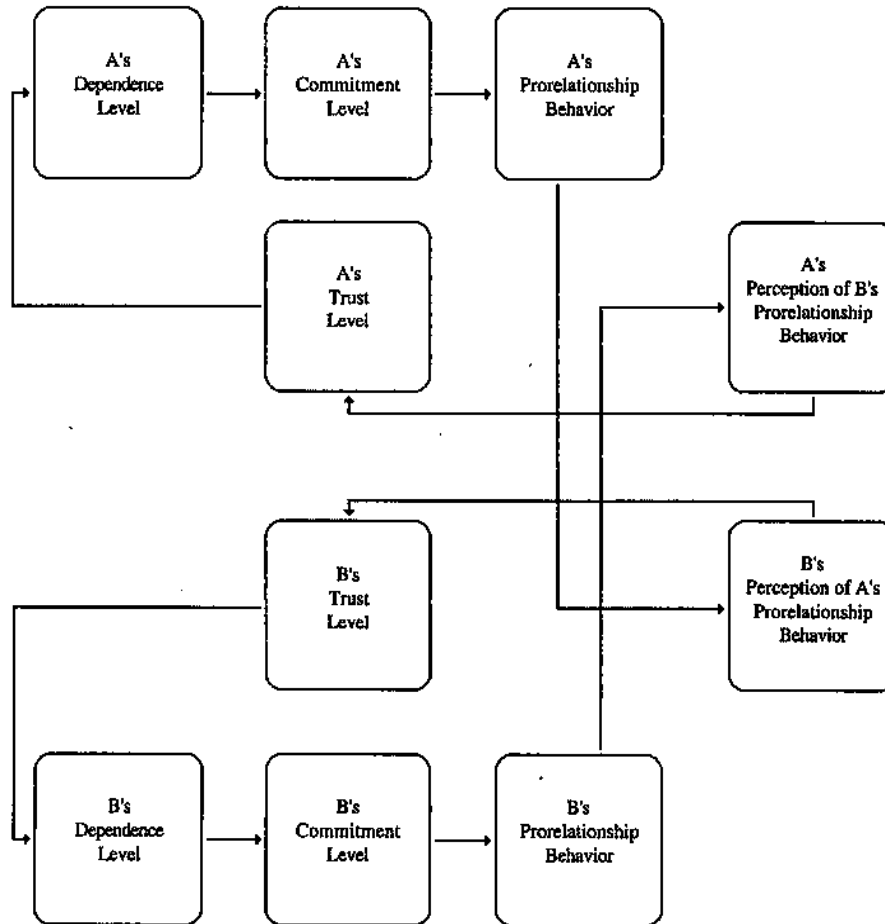


FIG. 5.4. Commitment, prorelationship behavior, and trust.

Foster, & Agnew, 1999). This work examined two forms of prorelationship behavior—accommodative behavior and willingness to sacrifice. We obtained support for each component of the model not only in (a) concurrent analyses, wherein each predictor was observed to be associated with each criterion at each time period, but also in (b) residualized lagged analyses, wherein earlier scores for each predictor were found to be associated with change over time in each criterion. Moreover, first-order mediation analyses revealed good support for the rather precise model of cause-and-effect relations outlined in Fig. 5.4.

Thus, it may be useful to conceptualize commitment and trust as aspects of relationship regulation. Our work demonstrates that as people be-

come increasingly dependent they develop strong commitment, which in turn yields enhanced willingness to engage in prorelationship acts such as accommodation and sacrifice. When partners perceive such prorelationship acts, they develop enhanced trust, which in turn leads them to become increasingly dependent—increasingly satisfied, willing to drive away or derogate alternatives, and willing to invest in a relationship in material and nonmaterial ways. This brings us full circle, in that enhanced dependence yields increased commitment. Thus, relationships to some degree are internally regulated: Via the process of adaptation to evolving patterns of interdependence, changes in each person's actions and motives trigger complementary changes in the partner. Adaptations such as these reside at the heart of an interdependence analysis (cf. Kelley, 1983b; Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996).

CONCLUSIONS

What do we gain by adopting an interdependence theoretic analysis of maintenance processes in close relationships? First, although social psychologists frequently allude to person-by-situation interactions, we devote little attention to understanding situations *per se*. For example, the most prominent model of couples therapy is cognitive-behavioral therapy, which emphasizes the role of poor social skills and attributional tendencies in causing marital distress. From the point of view of interdependence theory, distress may rest at least in part on the situation—that is, on problematic interdependence structure. To help couples achieve harmonious interaction, we should exert as much effort modifying the couple's circumstances of interdependence as we exert modifying each person's social skills and thought processes.

Second, some theories emphasize the disappearance of self-interest in close relationships, suggesting that with increasing closeness self-interest and partner interests become merged (Aron & Aron, 1997), or arguing that in communal relationships individuals depart from their self-interest simply because the partner needs them to do so (Clark & Mills, 1979). In contrast, interdependence theory proposes that self-interest continues to make itself known in ongoing relationships. Indeed, the fact that close partners frequently engage in positive yet personally costly acts is precisely what communicates their prorelationship motives. The fact that we engage in positive acts, despite awareness that such behavior frequently is antithetical to our self-interest, is precisely what makes positive behavior meaningful.

Finally, some theories of close relationships emphasize individual-level processes, explaining behavior by reference to properties that reside

within actors—by reference to individual-level cognition, dispositions, or motives. In contrast, interdependence theory explains behavior by reference to properties that reside both within and between actors, highlighting the importance of interdependence structure in shaping the course of ongoing involvements. By calling attention to truly dyadic features of closeness (e.g., by calling attention to the importance of dependence and the existence of noncorrespondent outcomes), an interdependence theoretic analysis provides the field with a much-needed social psychological analysis of human behavior.

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