

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE SELF: EGOSYSTEM AND ECOSYSTEM

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Most social scientists assume that people are fundamentally self-interested, that they do what they perceive to be advantageous to themselves (Miller, 1999). Unsurprisingly, this view pervades research on the self, in which people are depicted as self-enhancing and self-protective, seeking validation and affirmation, and taking credit for successes but dodging blame for failures. Perhaps more surprising, this view also pervades a great deal of research on relationships, which presumably involve shared bonds between people and feelings such as closeness, caring, affection, or love. Many researchers assume that people in relationships, as in the rest of their lives, are fundamentally self-centered and self-serving. In this view, people want to be in relationships to promote their own ends, they use relationship partners to satisfy their own needs, and they sacrifice and compromise in relationships to keep their relationship partners happy so they can continue to reap benefits the relationship brings them. Being desired, idealized, and accepted by another person are peak relationship experiences, whereas being unwanted, criticized, or rejected are ultimate downers.

Although this view surely describes many relationships at least some of the time, we believe that it is at best incomplete and at worst wildly misleading as a depiction of the self in relationships. In this chapter, we begin by articulating the self-centered view of relationships that dominates much research and theory on relationships and the self. Consistent with our previous work, we call this orientation to relationships *egosity motivation* (Crocker, 2008;

Crocker & Canevello, 2008, 2012b; Crocker, Olivier, & Nuer, 2009). We first describe this system in general terms that apply to most, if not all, types of relationships. Then, because romantic relationships are the focus of a great deal of interest and research, we describe the principles of romantic relationships driven by egosity motivation.

We next describe an emerging alternate view, in which people have the capacity to transcend self-interest and care deeply about people and things beyond themselves, which we call *ecosystem motivation* (Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Canevello, 2008, 2012b; Crocker et al., 2006). In relationships, people driven by ecosystem motivation seek to promote the well-being of the relationship partner not out of selfish motives to obtain benefits in return, but because they care about the partner or because both people care about the well-being of someone or something beyond themselves. We describe this perspective in general terms and then consider the principles of romantic relationships from the ecosystem perspective. We consider factors that predict which set of principles—those of the egosity system or those of the ecosystem—will best describe a particular relationship at a particular moment. We then suggest a number of issues for future research.

SELF AND RELATIONSHIPS MOTIVATED BY THE ECOSYSTEM

The ecosystem is a motivational system centered on the self; in this system, people are primarily concerned with ensuring that their own needs are met

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/14344-004>

APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology: Vol. 3. Interpersonal Relations, M. Mikulincer and P. R. Shaver (Editors-in-Chief)
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and their desires satisfied (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). The important quality of relationships in the egosystem is that people strive for benefits that flow to the self from relationship partners. In this system, people are not particularly concerned about others' well-being. Accordingly, people with egosystem motivation in relationships prioritize their own needs and desires over those of other people. They are self-involved, focusing on what being in the relationship or the quality of the relationship says about them, in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. They aim to maximize their gains and minimize their losses in the relationship and in their interactions with relationship partners. They tend to view outcomes as zero-sum in nature, such that satisfaction of the needs and desires of one person must necessarily come at the expense of others (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a).

In this system, other people matter only if they can potentially satisfy or thwart one's own needs and desires. To the extent that others matter, they are viewed as an obstacle to be overcome or as a means to an end. In this system, people do not expect others to care much about their well-being for its own sake. They feel at the mercy of relationship partners because they must induce others to help them get their needs met (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). Accordingly, when people are driven by egosystem motivation, they attempt to control others through persuasion, negotiation, ingratiation, manipulation, or intimidation (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). In interpersonal contexts, they typically have self-image goals; that is, they try to get others to view them as having desired qualities, and as not having undesired qualities, so that others will give them what they want. They focus on proving themselves to others and obtaining validation that relationship partners recognize their positive qualities (Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Canevello, 2012a; Crocker et al., 2009).

Because relationship events in the egosystem implicate the self, emotions in these relationships tend to involve high arousal. Acceptance and validation from relationship partners elicit self-conscious emotions such as pride and boosts to self-esteem, whereas rejection and criticism elicit shame or humiliation. Furthermore, basic emotions such as

anger, fear, sadness, and happiness are self-referent; in the egosystem, one might feel anger at being treated unfairly by a relationship partner, fear of a relationship partner's negative judgment, sadness about the loss of a relationship partner, and elation or joy when obtaining desired outcomes from a relationship partner.

At the same time, relationships in the egosystem tend to elicit ambivalent feelings. Because people in this system tend to have a zero-sum view of relationships, positive events for the self are assumed to have negative implications for relationship partners, and vice versa. Thus, relationships in the egosystem inherently put people between the proverbial rock and a hard place, because although people want outcomes for themselves, they or the relationship may pay for the cost this extracts from others. Consequently, relationships in the egosystem tend to involve feeling afraid, conflicted, and confused (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

Note that in the egosystem behavior is not completely selfish; people sometimes sacrifice or give to their relationship partners. The important question is why. In this system, people give, sacrifice, and support relationship partners as a loan or an investment, to obtain something in return from the partners (Van Lange et al., 1997). They might give expecting their partners to reciprocate, as when people say "I love you" to get the other person to say it in return. They might trade, giving in one area to obtain what they want in another area. They might give to keep their partner from leaving, to induce feelings of gratitude in their partner, to become indispensable to their partner, or to create a bank of favors or good will they can draw on so their selfish behaviors do not destroy the relationship and therefore the benefits they obtain (Batson, 1979; Murray, Aloni, et al., 2009; Murray, Leder, et al., 2009). In the egosystem, people might sometimes give and not want their partner to reciprocate because they prefer to hold the moral high ground and be seen as the good person in the relationship.

Paradoxically, egosystem motivation in close relationships does not necessarily result in increased benefits for the self, in part because relationship partners appear to sense the selfish intentions behind giving in the egosystem (Crocker & Canevello,

2008, 2012a). In general, ecosystem motivation may lead people to adopt relatively short-term and narrowly self-interested perspectives in their relationships. Thus, in the ecosystem people may not think about the long-term consequences of their behaviors for the sustainability of relationships over time.

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ECOSYSTEM

Although people often care about satisfying their own needs and desires without regard for others, they also have the capacity for empathy, compassion, and generosity motivated by caring about the well-being of others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). Although selfish motives underlie some altruistic behavior, people sometimes genuinely care about others' well-being (Batson, 1998; S. L. Brown, Brown, & Penner, 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010). The ability to transcend one's own self-interest and to care about something besides one's own ego and desires has important implications for understanding relationships and how they function. Only recently, however, have self researchers begun to explore systematically the capacity to transcend egotism and self-interest (e.g., Wayment & Bauer, 2008). Similarly, although caring for others has long been recognized as an important aspect of attachment relationships, particularly between parents and children, the study of a motivational system that promotes unselfish caregiving in other types of relationships is a recent development (e.g., S. L. Brown et al., 2012; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2010).

We draw on the biological notion of an ecosystem as a metaphor for a motivational system in which the self is part of a larger whole, a system of separate individuals whose actions nonetheless have consequences for others, with repercussions for the entire system that ultimately affect the ability of everyone to satisfy their needs (Crocker et al., 2009). In the interpersonal ecosystem, people see themselves and their own needs and desires as part of a larger system of interconnected people, each of whom also has needs and desires (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). In this system, the well-being of one depends on the well-being of others and the entire system, not because others overlap mentally

with the self or are included in the self but because people who are separate and distinct and who have their own needs and desires nonetheless influence each other's well-being. The needs and desires of others are just as important and valid as the needs and desires of the self. This does not mean that in the ecosystem people treat everyone equally, feel responsible for satisfying everyone else's needs, or necessarily expend significant amounts of effort, expense, or time to ensure that everyone else's needs are met.

In the ecosystem, people care about others' well-being and assume that at least some other people care about their well-being for its own sake (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). In this system, people trust that their own needs will be met in collaboration with their social environment, not as the result of an exchange of benefits or a successful investment but because others care about their well-being. Consequently, they do not need to manipulate, persuade, or convince others to help them satisfy their needs and desires. They recognize that satisfying their own needs and desires at the expense of others inevitably has costs to the system and ultimately themselves. Accordingly, they search for ways to get their needs met in collaboration with other people or in ways that do not harm others. People tend to feel cooperative with others and view desired outcomes as having a non-zero-sum or win-win quality. That is, they assume that success for one person need not detract from others (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Because others care about the self, giving to others need not be costly to the self.

In this system, people feel at the source in relationships because they view themselves as the starting point in their relationships, responsible for creating relationships that are good for others as well as the self (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). Thus, compatible with Ghandi's admonition to "be the change you want to see in the world," being at the source means "it starts with me." Accordingly, when people are driven by ecosystem motivation, they take others' needs and desires into account, considering the impact of their decisions and behaviors on people they care about (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a). In interpersonal contexts, they typically have compassionate goals; that is, they focus on

being supportive and constructive toward others and on making a contribution (Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Canevello, 2012a; Crocker et al., 2009).

Relationships in the ecosystem typically elicit calm, peaceful feelings (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Because in the ecosystem people care about others and not just themselves, they are not ego involved in events; they do not view relationship events as primarily implicating the self, diagnostic of their worth and value. Their primary concern is not how events in the relationship affect satisfaction of their own needs and desires. Consequently, in the ecosystem people are less likely to experience self-relevant emotions such as self-focused pride, shame, or humiliation, and they are more likely to experience other-directed, low-arousal emotions such as compassionate love (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), gratitude (Tsang, 2006), and empathic concern (Batson, 1987). Acceptance and validation from relationship partners elicit humility (Exline, 2008; Tangney, 2009), whereas rejection and criticism may elicit sadness but not ego-involved emotions such as jealousy, humiliation, or shame. Furthermore, because people care about the well-being of others, basic emotions such as anger, fear, sadness, and happiness are more likely to be other-referent; in the ecosystem, one might feel anger when a relationship partner is treated unfairly, fear that a relationship partner will be hurt, sadness for a relationship partner's loss, and happiness or joy when a relationship partner obtains desired outcomes. Because people in this system tend to have a non-zero-sum view of relationships, positive events for the self are not assumed to have negative implications for relationship partners and vice versa (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Thus, relationships in the ecosystem lead people to feel aligned with others and cooperative rather than competitive (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

In the ecosystem, people are not completely selfless, self-sacrificing, or self-disparaging. The sustainable alternative to the selfish egosystem is not selflessness, costly altruism, or self-sacrifice; it is contributing or giving that is good for others and the self. Selflessness is unsustainable over time because it is bad for oneself and therefore bad for one's interpersonal ecosystem. Apparent selflessness or

self-sacrifice often serves egoistic ends, such as demonstrating one's generosity to others, earning respect or admiration, or making others feel indebted (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). Unmitigated communion, or excessive concern for others in relationships, is often driven by the desire to boost self-esteem or keep others close by demonstrating that one is indispensable (Fritz & Helgeson, 1998). Again, the important question is why people sacrifice or give to their partners (Konrath, Fuhrel-Forbis, Lou, & Brown, 2012). In the ecosystem, people give, sacrifice, and support relationship partners freely, trusting that their own needs will be met in collaboration with others. Although needs may sometimes be met by the partner, they can also be in collaboration with others in the interpersonal ecosystem. Giving is not a loan or an investment, to obtain something in return from others. In the ecosystem, people do not give to get others to reciprocate, as a trade, or to keep their partner from leaving. Giving in the ecosystem is not to hold the moral high ground or prove something about the self. People give voluntarily, with no strings attached, with the intention to promote the well-being of others (e.g., Feeney & Collins, 2003).

Paradoxically, ecosystem motivation in close relationships seems to result in increased benefits for the self, in part because giving directly benefits the self and in part because relationship partners appear to sense the caring intentions behind giving in the ecosystem (Crocker & Canevello, 2008, 2012a). In general, ecosystem motivation may lead people to adopt relatively long-term views of relationships, in which they consider the consequences of their behaviors for the sustainability of relationships over time.

CATEGORIZING RELATIONSHIP THEORIES AS EGOSYSTEM OR ECOSYSTEM

If, as we hypothesize, there are two sets of fundamental principles of relationships—one governing relationships in the egosystem and the other governing relationships in the ecosystem—then it becomes important to understand which relationship theories, programs of research, and empirical findings link to which set of principles. The distinction

between egosystem and ecosystem motivations in relationships is not about what people do but about why they do it; in the egosystem, people are primarily concerned with satisfaction of their own needs and desires, whereas in the ecosystem people care about the well-being of others—with an emphasis on the emotional bond of caring. In our reading of the literature, researchers are often vague about this issue, or their work is misinterpreted.

One of many examples concerns research on the distinction between communal and exchange relationships. Clark and Mills (e.g., Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986) proposed that the giving and receipt of benefits in relationships can be governed either by exchange norms, in which benefits are given with the expectation of receiving equal benefits in return, or by communal norms, in which benefits are given noncontingently to promote the well-being of the partner.

The focus on norms governing receipt of benefits in both the original qualitative distinction between communal and exchange relationships and the subsequent research on variation in communal strength is often interpreted as meaning that exchange relationships are selfish, whereas communal relationships are selfless (Clark, 2011). However, as Clark (2011) pointed out, people can have selfish motivations in a communal relationship, and they can have selfless motivations in an exchange relationship. The desire for a communal relationship leads people to focus on what their partners do for them and monitor their partner's responsiveness to their needs (Clark, Dubash, & Mills, 1998). Indeed, people may desire a communal relationship with another person because they believe such a relationship is the best way to satisfy their own needs; they are willing to attend to the needs of their partner to obtain the benefits of being in a communal relationship. The Communal Orientation Scale, which assesses individual differences in the tendency to adopt communal norms in relationships, includes items such as "It bothers me when other people neglect my needs" and "I expect people I know to be responsive to my needs and feelings," consistent with the idea that people may have a communal orientation as a strategy for getting their own needs met (Clark, Oullette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987).

Likewise, the strength of a communal relationship is operationalized as how much cost people will incur in terms of time, money, or effort to benefit another person; the scale is not a measure of how much people care about the other person or are willing to give noncostly emotional support (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004).

By the same reasoning, exchange relationships are not inherently selfish or motivated by the egosystem. There is nothing inherently selfish about wanting to pay a fair price for goods one purchases in an exchange relationship; in the ecosystem, people may want a seller to obtain a fair price and make a decent living because they care about the seller's well-being and so the relationship can be sustained over time. They may consider the well-being of those who produce or distribute goods they purchase, the impact of production and distribution on the environment, and other factors that affect the well-being of others and the sustainability of the interpersonal ecosystem. We do not suggest that communal relationships are always motivated by the egosystem or exchange relationships by the ecosystem; in general, communal strength correlates positively with love and caring. Sharing, however, is not the same thing as caring; sometimes responding to the needs of others is governed by strong communal norms because people feel obligated and not because they feel love, as when adult children feel resentful yet obligated to respond to their aging parents' needs. Sometimes people care about the well-being of those with whom they have exchange relationships. The norms that apply to a particular relationship do not necessarily govern whether people in that relationship have egosystem or ecosystem motivations.

We use the communal–exchange distinction to illustrate a broader point about the confusion that can arise in relationship theories, in part because Clark herself has attempted to clarify this same confusion (Clark, 2011). Many other theories and programs of research have been vague either in their conceptualization or in others' interpretations as to whether people prioritize their own well-being in their close relationships over that of their relationship partners or whether they take others' well-being into account because they care about them.

Examining close relationships through the lens of egosystem and ecosystem motivational systems may clarify the psychology of relationships.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE EGOSYSTEM: IT'S ABOUT ME

Egosystem motivation shapes the quality of romantic relationships in all their stages, from initial attraction and drawing close, through the thrill of falling in love, to maintaining the relationship, to relationship breakdown and dissolution.

Attraction: Impression Management and Self-Presentation

In the egosystem, people want to be in a romantic relationship for the benefits it can provide them. These benefits may range from tangible benefits such as financial advantages (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, Drigotas, & Verette, 1994) and access to an attractive sexual partner (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult et al., 1994) to intangible benefits such as feelings of security and belonging, meeting normative expectations that one should be in a relationship (DePaulo & Morris, 2006), basking in the reflected glory of the partner's accomplishments (Tesser, 1988), and a boost in self-esteem (Sanchez & Kwang, 2007).

Accordingly, the initial goal of a relationship is to attract the most desirable partner one can and win his or her love and affection (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000). To attract a partner, people want to ensure that potential partners see them as having desirable qualities and as not having undesirable qualities. Self-presentation can help people accomplish interpersonal goals that depend on influencing or controlling the responses other people have to them (Schlenker, 2003). Consequently, in the initial stages of romantic relationships in the egosystem, people present themselves in the best possible light, acting in ways that ensure that potential partners notice their positive qualities and do not see them as having negative qualities. People get their game face on, put their best foot forward, and are on their best behavior. For example, to appear more feminine, women eat less when getting acquainted with a desirable man than when getting acquainted with a

less desirable man or a woman (Mori, Chaiken, & Pliner, 1987; Pliner & Chaiken, 1990). The qualities considered attractive or desirable can vary; different people might want to ensure that potential partners see them as physically attractive, outdoorsy, kind, or accommodating. When attempting to attract a specific partner, self-presentations may be tailored to the preferences of the prospect. For example, women expecting to interact with a socially desirable man who held traditional attitudes toward women described themselves as possessing more stereotypic feminine attitudes and traits than women expecting to interact with a man with less traditional views (Zanna & Pack, 1975).

There are limits to the images people can successfully present to others (Schlenker, 2003). Although anyone can describe him- or herself as tall, attractive, and physically fit on an Internet dating service, many gross misrepresentations will quickly be uncovered in face-to-face meetings. Most self-presentation involves efforts to convey roughly accurate but slightly improved, polished, or glorified images of oneself (Greenwald & Breckler, 1985).

The initial attraction stage of romantic relationships in the egosystem creates several types of risk. First, one could fail to attract desirable partners for a variety of reasons: because one lacks qualities others desire, one's self-presentation skills are lacking, or the people one desires are unavailable or unobtainable. The risk of failing to attract someone desirable is what the failure says about oneself—that one is unattractive and undesirable—and the consequent blow to self-esteem (Sanchez, Good, Kwang, & Saltzman, 2008; Sanchez & Kwang, 2007).

Second, one could be fooled by a prospective partner's self-presentation and drawn into a relationship with a person with serious flaws, perhaps forgoing more attractive alternatives in the process. Because both partners likely have the same aim to attract the most desirable mate possible, by presenting themselves in a positive light each risks being duped by the other, believing the other person has qualities he or she does not, in fact, have. Consequently, each must verify that the self-presentations of the prospective partner are based on fact rather than fiction. They may ask mutual acquaintances, do Internet research, or even hire a private

investigator to verify that a prospective partner has the desirable qualities he or she claims. Efforts to verify the claims of potential partners can be time consuming, expensive, and unreliable; for example, friends will often aid and abet self-presentations, whereas exes may have axes to grind, making them less than ideal references (Schlenker & Britt, 1999). At the same time, however, when a prospective partner appears to offer important benefits (e.g., when the partner is very attractive, wealthy, or powerful), people may be motivated to discount or overlook potential partners' shortcomings even at this early stage (Kunda, 1990). For example, the fact that a prospective partner's previous two marriages ended in divorce after extramarital affairs may be discounted ("It will be different with me") or the seriousness of a gambling or alcohol problem diminished because of the benefits that could be gained in the relationship. Thus, even in the initial attraction stage, potential partners may collude to support each other's self-presentations and overlook flaws that pose significant problems to a relationship.

Third, prospective partners might see through one's own self-presentations. Prospective partners who discover one's foibles and flaws might lose interest or conclude that they could do better with another person, leading to rejection. Consequently, initial stages of relationships in the egosystem involve pressure to be at one's best and concomitant anxiety that one might not be able to sustain the illusion. Although concern about having one's flaws revealed may encourage people to be their best selves, with potentially lasting consequences (see Schlenker, 2003, for a review), self-presentation interferes with getting to know and being known by the other person beyond a superficial level. Initial attraction in the egosystem, then, is less about attraction between two authentic human beings and more about attraction between two constructed images.

Drawing Close: Risk Regulation

Once people have attracted the interest of a potential partner, to obtain many of the benefits of romantic relationships they must draw close to one another. In the egosystem, closeness may involve inclusion of the relationship partner in representations of the

self, thus expanding the resources available to the self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). In close relationships in the egosystem, one's happiness depends on one's partner (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). A key predictor of closeness is perceived partner responsiveness to the self—that is, the degree to which people believe that their partner understands who they are, cares about them, and validates central, core features of the self (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004).

How, then, do relationships in the egosystem evolve from attracting a partner through self-presentation of desired images to a degree of closeness based on the perception that one's partner understands, cares about, and validates central features of the self? The risk regulation model describes the dilemma of this phase of romantic relationships in the egosystem (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). According to the risk regulation model, people obtain many of the psychological benefits of relationships, such as feelings of belonging and connectedness, only when they become emotionally close to their partners. Closeness, however, requires vulnerability; people must "behave in ways that give a partner power over their outcomes and emotions and think in ways that invest great value and importance in the relationship" (Murray et al., 2006, p. 641). These behaviors both increase the potential for rejection in the short term and intensify the pain of rejection if and when it occurs in the long term.

According to the risk regulation model, people resolve this dilemma by monitoring the regard their partner has for them and acting in ways that increase vulnerability and closeness only when they are confident that they will not be rejected. When they perceive that their partner's regard is waning, people increase psychological distance from their partners to protect themselves from the pain of rejection. Relationships in the egosystem begin with mistrust; partners must earn the trust that permits vulnerability and closeness. Trust develops as a result of diagnostic situations, when people perceive that their partners behave in ways that benefit the relationship, departing from their direct self-interest for the good of the relationship (e.g., Simpson, 2007; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew,

1999). Ultimately, if their partner passes repeated tests by responding to vulnerability and self-disclosures with understanding, caring, and validation and signals his or her positive regard, people will gradually allow their weaknesses and shortcomings to be known by their partners, creating intimacy and closeness.

Despite this increasing vulnerability, however, in the egosystem people continue to want their partners to idealize them; that is, they want their partners to regard them more highly than they regard themselves (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). This creates a Catch-22 situation—people want to be close and vulnerable to their partners but fear that revealing their weaknesses might undermine the idealized images their partners have of them.

Several aspects of the risk regulation model prompt us to suggest that it characterizes relationships in the egosystem. First, the focus of the model is on obtaining benefits and avoiding risk for the self; in this model, people are preoccupied with their own needs and desires. Second, although people may give support to their partners, they do so only when they are confident that their partner will not reject them, and they do so to obtain benefits for the self. Third, the key mechanism that regulates closeness versus distance in relationships is perceived partner regard. Thus, the image partners have of the self is a constant concern. Fourth, in the risk regulation model people feel at the mercy of their partners. People cannot allow themselves to be vulnerable in ways that create closeness until their partners have proven their trustworthiness and signaled their regard and caring. The worst thing that can happen in relationships is the pain of being rejected by a partner after one has allowed oneself to be vulnerable, so one's happiness is in the hands of one's partner.

Love: Desire and the Ego High

When people present themselves successfully, attract a romantic partner, and draw close while regulating the risks of dependency, they may fall in love. Although falling in love can be a mutual experience between partners, it has two separable aspects—loving another and being loved. In the egosystem, both aspects of love center on oneself.

Loving. Passionate love has been described as “a state of intense longing for union with another” (Hatfield & Walster, 1978, p. 9). In the egosystem, loving another person involves desire—not necessarily sexual desire (Diamond, 2003; Gonzaga, Turner, Keltner, Campos, & Altemus, 2006), but the desire of wanting to win, possess, or acquire the loved one.

The distinction between wanting and liking proposed by addiction researchers is useful when characterizing love in the egosystem (Berridge, 2004a, 2004b; Berridge & Robinson, 1995; Robinson & Berridge, 2003). In this research, *liking* refers to activation of pleasure systems in the brain, whereas *wanting* refers to the attributed incentive value of the object of desire, which drives the desire to consume it. Although liking and wanting often coincide, they are potentially separable: One can derive pleasure from a sunset but not want to consume it, and one can want to consume cake without deriving pleasure from it. We suggest that loving someone in the egosystem involves wanting the person but not necessarily liking him or her.

Consistent with the idea that passionate love in the egosystem is like an addiction, passionate love shares some similarities with addiction to substances, including euphoria and unrestrained desire in the presence of the loved one; desperation, anhedonia, and sleep disturbance when separated from the loved one; focused attention on and intrusive thoughts about the loved one; and maladaptive patterns of behavior leading to distress and pursuit of the loved one despite knowledge of adverse consequences (see Reynaud, Karila, Blecha, & Benyamina, 2010, for a review). Some studies have indicated that passionate love and substance dependence involve similar brain regions and neurotransmitters. These addictive qualities of passionate love in the egosystem may explain why it is usually unsustainable (Acevedo & Aron, 2009).

Being loved. When passionate love is reciprocated, people experience the emotional high of winning their partner's love and affection. In the egosystem, falling in love—that is, winning the love and affection of a partner one desires—indicates that one is desirable and loveable, hence raising self-esteem

(Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Indeed, no other life event may have the same potential for boosting self-esteem as winning the love of a desired partner because the degree of acceptance is very high and the entire self is validated. To be sure, people differ in how much their self-esteem is contingent on being in a relationship (Sanchez & Kwang, 2007) and on having that relationship go well (Knee, Canevello, Bush, & Cook, 2008). However, if self-esteem is an indicator of perceived relational value, as sociometer theory suggests (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), being loved by a desired partner is likely an important self-esteem boost for nearly everyone. Falling in love should boost one's relational value in the eyes of other people as well. Particularly if the partner is considered desirable by others, winning the partner's love is a sure signal that one has value as a romantic relationship partner.

Beyond boosting self-esteem, falling in love also appears to expand the contents of the self-concept. Seeing the self through the eyes of a loving partner, people may see qualities in themselves they did not know they had or did not appreciate before. In addition, according to self-expansion theory, "a close relationship involves integrating, to some extent, other's resources, perspectives, and characteristics into the self" (Aron et al., 1995, p. 1103). Thus, people gain in numerous ways when they are loved by another.

Once people win the love and affection of a partner, their motivation to have positive illusions about their partner increases. Whereas people trying to attract a desirable partner may want to know the reality behind the partner's self-presentation, once they have won the partner's love and affection they should be highly motivated to see that person in the most desirable ways possible (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b). After all, being loved by someone with many highly desirable qualities should be a greater boost to self-esteem and one's public image than being loved by someone with obvious flaws and foibles.

Satisfaction and Commitment: Negotiating Conflicting Goals and Desires

Once people have attracted a partner, drawn close, and perhaps fallen in love, they may be sufficiently

satisfied with the relationship that they commit to it. In the egosystem, relationship satisfaction depends on the degree to which the relationship gratifies one's own important needs and desires; commitment refers to the desire for the relationship to last a long time (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). Satisfaction is an important, but not the only, predictor of commitment to a relationship. According to the investment model, commitment to the relationship develops as a result of high levels of satisfaction, the absence of available alternatives (i.e., other potential partners who could more effectively gratify one's important needs and desires), and high levels of investment of resources (e.g., personal identity, effort, or material possessions) that would be lost or reduced if one were not in the relationship (Rusbult et al., 1994, 1998). Thus, in the egosystem people might remain committed to a relationship even though an available alternative would provide them more benefits if they have invested significant resources in the current relationship.

Love and commitment involve interdependence; each partner has the capacity to influence the happiness of the other, for better or worse (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). A variety of conflicts of interest may develop that could threaten the relationship and therefore the benefits people obtain from it. One such conflict of interest is a potential threat to self-esteem or self-evaluation when people are outperformed by their partner in an important, self-defining domain (Tesser, 1988). A second type of conflict of interest involves incompatibility of preferences, goals, and desires, so when one partner gets what he or she wants, the other necessarily does not (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Third, one's relationship partner may behave badly, acting in ways that seem inconsiderate or annoying (Yovetich & Rusbult, 1994). The most serious type of conflict involves acts of betrayal, in which one partner humiliates or degrades the other partner (Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro, & Hannon, 2002).

Conflicts of interest such as these challenge relationships in the egosystem because they interfere with the gratification of needs and desires on which relationship satisfaction depends. People can respond to these conflicts in ways that promote their

direct self-interest, for example by attempting to outperform their partner or sabotaging the partner's performance (Tesser, 1988); by insisting that their own needs and desires are met, even at the expense of their partner; by criticizing their partner's annoying behaviors; or by retaliating against the partner in the case of betrayal. These responses promote self-interest in the immediate situation but have high costs to the relationship over time (Rusbult & Agnew, 2010). Alternatively, people can undergo what Rusbult and Van Lange (2003) called a *transformation of motivation*, prioritizing the survival of the relationship over direct and immediate self-interest. For example, people can respond to conflicts of goals and desires with sacrifice (e.g., compromising or deferring to their partner's wishes), to bad behavior from their partner with conciliation and accommodation (e.g., ignoring the bad behavior), and to betrayal with forgiveness (Rusbult & Agnew, 2010).

Because sacrifice, accommodation, and forgiveness do not effectively resolve the original conflict, relationship satisfaction may decline over time despite these prorelationship responses and the trust they engender (Wieselquist et al., 1999). People may sustain their commitment despite their decreased satisfaction after conflicts of interest by convincing themselves that their relationship is superior to other relationships (Rusbult, Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000) or by ignoring or devaluing alternative relationship partners (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).

According to Rusbult and Agnew (2010), sacrifice, accommodation, and forgiveness are constructive responses to conflicts because they promote the survival of the relationship. The more committed people are to a relationship, the more likely they are to respond to conflicts with prorelationship behaviors. Although these responses might be considered prosocial in this sense, their association with commitment implicates the egosystem, in our opinion. Because commitment in this research is a product of satisfaction (i.e., people believe their needs and desires are gratified by the relationship), lack of better alternative relationships, and investment (i.e., the resources people stand to lose if the relationship ends), associations of prorelationship

behaviors with commitment suggest that they are typically driven by concern with one's own needs and desires. The transformation of motivation that precedes these prorelationship behaviors is not typically a shift away from egosystem motivation but rather a shift from one's immediate, narrow self-interest in the specific situation to one's larger self-interest as a partner in the relationship over time.

Breaking Up: Leaving and Being Left

In the egosystem, relationship breakups happen when one of the relationship partners determines that the benefits he or she would gain from breaking up outweigh the costs. People are more likely to choose to leave a relationship when their dependence and investment are low. That is, people are more likely to choose to leave when they do not stand to lose resources (Rusbult et al., 1994, 1998) and when their important needs can be better met elsewhere than in their current relationship (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). Commitment to the relationship (i.e., the desire for the relationship to last), which includes need gratification, availability of alternatives, and investment, is a strong predictor of decisions to stay in the relationship rather than leave it (Rusbult et al., 1994).

Whereas the investment model predicts who will choose to leave and who will choose to stay in relationships in the egosystem, other researchers have focused on the reactions of the person who is left. Just as falling in love is one of the most significant self-esteem boosts people can experience, involuntarily being left, particularly for another person, provides a clear signal that one lacks sufficient relational value to hold onto a partner. This is one of the most significant blows to self-esteem people can experience (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). People whose self-esteem is invested in having a good relationship, or simply in being in a relationship, are particularly vulnerable to feelings of worthlessness when a relationship breaks up (Knee et al., 2008; Park, Sanchez, & Brynildsen, 2011a). Romantic jealousy is related to both the self-esteem threat of potentially being left for another and the loss of relationship benefits (Mathes, Adams, & Davies, 1985; Sharpsteen, 1995; White, 1981). Even those whose self-esteem is not particularly invested in being in a

good relationship experience a loss of benefits, ranging from financial and material benefits to companionship and social support (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). Not surprisingly, the person who is left is more dependent on the relationship for satisfaction of important needs than the person who leaves. Perhaps more surprising, people who are left feel just as dependent on their partners as people in relationships that do not break up (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). In addition to dependency on a partner for satisfaction of important needs, greater investment of time, effort, and material resources in the relationship should make being left particularly painful. When people feel close to a relationship partner and include the other in mental representations of themselves (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), believe that their partner brings out the best in them (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009), or believe that their partner knows them intimately, being left should hurt even more.

Research on social exclusion has demonstrated that the self-threat of being rejected has a wide range of negative effects beyond loss of self-esteem and increased negative emotions. Social exclusion can lead to failures of self-control (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Twenge, 2005), decreased prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007), distorted perceptions of time, meaninglessness, decreased self-awareness (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2003), and increased self-destructive behavior (Twenge, Catanese, & Baumeister, 2002). Even the threat of being alone later in one's life leads to the temporary loss of cognitive capacities (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002). Destructive impulses may be directed against the self, as in risk taking, drinking, or suicide attempts (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Scher, 1988; Leith & Baumeister, 1996), or against the rejecting partner, as in stalking or physical violence (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001). Although most of the relevant research has not focused specifically on romantic rejection, it seems plausible that romantic rejection is more threatening to self-esteem and therefore has more negative effects than exclusion from a group of strangers in a laboratory experiment (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995) or ostracism in a game of cyberball with

computer avatars (van Beest & Williams, 2006). Whether destructive impulses are directed toward the self or toward the rejecting partner, destructive responses to romantic rejection can exact a high toll.

Destructive responses to rejection are particularly likely for relationships in the egosystem. Findings have indicated that people with a more fragile sense of self-worth are particularly likely to respond in counterproductive, destructive, and ultimately self-destructive ways, suggesting that these destructive responses are driven by ego involvement in the relationship, in one form or another. For example, destructive or counterproductive responses to rejection have been linked to individual differences in narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2003), fragile egotism (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996), relationship-contingent self-esteem (Park, Sanchez, & Brynildsen, 2011b), shame proneness (Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall, & Gramzow, 1996), and rejection sensitivity (Downey, Feldman, & Ayduk, 2000; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

Although most research has focused on destructive responses to rejection, rejection can increase the desire to affiliate with new partners (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007). This finding might explain why some people enter rebound relationships right after a breakup—they need the connection to feel that they belong.

Summary

To this point, we have described a number of widely accepted principles of romantic relationships. The theories and findings summarized so far represent, for the most part, the established and accepted wisdom of relationship researchers, self researchers, or both. These principles of relationships all view romantic relationships as a means to gratify one's own needs and desires, whether for companionship and support, material well-being, self-esteem, or other desirable outcomes. The needs and desires of others, including relationship partners, are secondary and are taken into account only because maintaining the benefits of being in the relationship require it.

We do not mean to suggest that all relationships in the egosystem are the same. Just as “every unhappy

family is unhappy in its own way” (as Tolstoy wrote), every relationship may have its own egosystem dynamics. Relationship researchers have noted a variety of ways in which people differ in their characteristic approaches to relationships. For example, people can have approach and avoidance reasons for sacrificing in their relationships (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Impett et al., 2010) and anxious or avoidant styles of attachment insecurity (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Other researchers have documented that trait self-esteem moderates how people manage risk and opportunity in relationships (Forest & Wood, 2011; Murray et al., 2000; Wood & Forest, 2011).

While acknowledging the reality of these differences and the consequences they have for relationships, we suggest that each of these distinctions describes two sides of the same coin rather than fundamentally different paradigms in relationships. For example, both the self-protection of people low in self-esteem and the self-enhancement of people with high self-esteem reflect, first and foremost, a concern with self-esteem. Both sacrificing in relationships to keep one’s partner happy and sacrificing to avoid making one’s partner angry represent accommodation in conflict situations to continue obtaining the benefits of the relationship. Similarly, anxious and avoidant attachment styles represent different ways of coping with concern that one’s own needs will not be met in a relationship. Again, our point is not that these style differences are unimportant but that they represent different ways of managing relationships in the egosystem.

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ECOSYSTEM: IT’S ABOUT MORE THAN ME

Because the idea of relationships in the ecosystem is a newly emerging perspective on self and relationships, little research has examined how ecosystem motivation shapes the quality of romantic relationships in all stages. Thus, the following sections articulate hypotheses about romantic relationships in the ecosystem, citing supportive evidence when possible.

Attraction: Getting to Know Each Other

Although people with ecosystem motivation may want to be in a relationship, their main goal is not to

attract the person who can best satisfy their own needs and desires but rather to find a person whose joys and sorrows they want to share and whose well-being they want to support. Consequently, we hypothesize that the initial stage of relationships in the ecosystem focuses on getting to know each other—not only strengths and aspirations, but also foibles and challenges. Because in the ecosystem one’s own needs and desires are neither more nor less important than others’, people seek romantic relationships that are good for both partners. Thus, in the ecosystem, people should not be attracted to partners simply because of the physical, material, or emotional resources potential partners have or because potential partners are needy and can be rescued, but rather because they want to contribute to their partner’s well-being and the potential partner wants to contribute to their well-being.

The Michelangelo phenomenon, in which relationship partners help each other move toward their ideal selves (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Rusbult, Kumashiro, et al., 2009), may provide an example of this good-for-each-other aspect of relationships in the ecosystem. People are more attracted to potential partners when the partner’s actual qualities resemble their own ideal selves (Rusbult, Kumashiro, et al., 2009), consistent with either egosystem or ecosystem motivation. In ecosystem relationships, we expect that people are also more attracted to potential partners when the potential partner’s ideal self is inspiring to them; that is, they want to help the potential partner more toward his or her ideal self.

We hypothesize that relationships in the ecosystem are built on honesty and openness rather than self-presentation. Creating a relationship in which both partners take each other’s needs and desires into account requires that people be honest and open about their own needs and desires. Furthermore, in this system people acknowledge the ways in which they and their potential partner fall short of ideal. They share their hopes and dreams and perhaps also their fears. Thus, in contrast to relationships in the egosystem, relationships in the ecosystem begin with disclosure of emotionally significant self-relevant information.

Research on the Michelangelo phenomenon has indirectly highlighted this aspect of initial attraction in the ecosystem (Rusbult, Kumashiro, et al., 2009). Specifically, the finding that people are attracted to potential partners who can help them move closer to their ideal selves suggests that these people are willing to acknowledge that they fall short of their ideal selves in some regards. Similarly, the finding that partners who possess key components of one another's ideal selves are more likely to believe in one another's potential and challenge one another suggests that in these relationships people recognize some of their partner's imperfections, and they try to support their partner to move closer to his or her ideal (Rusbult, Kumashiro, et al., 2009).

Thus, romantic relationships in the ecosystem are built on vulnerability—acknowledging one's own and the potential partner's imperfections, seeing the potential in one another, and wanting to support each other to move toward each other's ideal self. Because in the ecosystem people tend to be at the source of what they want to experience in relationships rather than at the mercy of their partners, we expect that in these relationships people view themselves as the starting point of the openness, honesty, and vulnerability they want in their relationships; they do not wait for potential partners to reveal their imperfections, hopes, and fears before revealing their own.

The initial attraction stage of romantic relationships in the ecosystem involves some of the same risks as relationships in the egosystem. Specifically, as with relationships in the egosystem, one could fail to find a partner. Because people may disclose more emotionally significant self-relevant information early on in the relationship, rejection by a partner is not rejection of an image one has constructed of the self but rather rejection of one's authentic self, which can hurt. However, the conclusions people draw from rejection in the ecosystem differ from the conclusions they draw in the egosystem. In the egosystem, relationships validate self-esteem and relational value; rejection implies that one has low relational value and can pose a devastating blow to self-esteem. In the ecosystem, people seek a relationship that is good for both people; rejection implies that the relationship was not good for the other

person, so it was not the relationship one desired. The risk of failing to find a suitable partner is the disappointment of not having someone with whom to share one's hopes and fears and with whom to create a mutually supportive relationship. Although the failure to find a relationship partner may be sad and disappointing, it should not pose a devastating blow to self-esteem.

Furthermore, as in the egosystem, people could be fooled by a prospective partner's self-presentation. Thus, one person may take the risk to reveal his or her imperfections, hopes, and fears, whereas a potential partner engages in self-presentation. This sort of mismatch of goals should be relatively easy to detect, however, because the risks one person takes by revealing imperfections would not be reciprocated by the other, and neither person should find this situation appealing.

Drawing Close: Creating a Trusting and Supportive Relationship

In the ecosystem, closeness involves knowing each other and caring about each other's well-being rather than acquiring the other's resources as a result of including the other in the self (Aron et al., 1992). Relationships in the ecosystem are not built on self-presentation and image management but rather on vulnerability and honesty, which create the possibility for potential partners to know and care about each other. Consequently, drawing close in the ecosystem is simpler and less problematic (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

In contrast to the egosystem, in which drawing close involves increasingly depending on the other for gratification of one's needs and desires (Rusbult et al., 1994), in the ecosystem drawing close involves creating a mutually trusting, supportive, and responsive relationship (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Clark & Monin, 2006; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003). Self-esteem comes not from the perceived regard of partners or assessments of one's desirability to others but rather from giving support and being responsive to partners and knowing that one can make a positive contribution to another's well-being and support him or her to develop real potential. In roommate relationships,

for example, increases in students' self-esteem over the first semester of college are not predicted by how responsive they perceive their roommates to be but instead by how responsive students are to their roommates (Canevello & Crocker, 2011). Thus, self-esteem may reflect different aspects of perceived relational value in the ecosystem and the egosystem. Whereas in the egosystem perceived relational value depends on the desired images one has constructed in others' eyes, in the ecosystem it depends on knowing that one can contribute, making a positive difference for others. Although others may develop desired images of the self, one's own self-esteem does not depend on this happening.

Of course, growing close is not assured in romantic relationships in the ecosystem; sometimes as partners get to know each other well, they may conclude that their hopes and dreams are not compatible, or they may not wish to help each other move toward ideal selves they find uninspiring. Because the primary concern of relationships in the ecosystem is promoting the well-being of the partner in ways that are mutually beneficial, the failure to draw close may be sad and disappointing but not devastating to self-esteem.

Because people are less ego involved in relationships in the ecosystem, they should feel less need to regulate the risk of rejection by testing whether their partner can be trusted not to hurt them before they open up to the partner. Because they care about their partner's well-being and view themselves as the starting point of constructive relationship processes, they aim to create supportive, responsive relationships by giving support to their partner and responding to their partners' needs (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Their partners are likely to notice this supportive, responsive behavior and reciprocate by being supportive and responsive in return (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Gable & Reis, 2006; Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). Although partners are not guaranteed to reciprocate with increased support and responsiveness, research on college roommates has indicated that people who perceive that a relationship partner has become more supportive and responsive give more support and responsiveness in return (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

Through this process of caring about their partner's well-being and creating upward spirals of support and responsiveness in the relationship, people develop increased trust (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). In contrast to the egosystem, in which trust is initially low and partners must earn trust by acting against their own self-interest for the good of the relationship (Wieselquist et al., 1999), in the ecosystem relationships begin with trust. This is not to suggest that people with ecosystem motivation trust blindly; rather, if partners in diagnostic situations act on their direct self-interest in ways that are bad for the self or harm the relationship, then trust will decline (e.g., Simpson, 2007; Wieselquist et al., 1999). Whereas trust in the egosystem depends on partners proving their trustworthiness, in the ecosystem people are the starting point of trust, creating trust by caring about their partner's well-being. Over time, closeness increases for both partners (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Furthermore, when people notice that their partners have become more responsive, they tend to develop increased compassionate goals toward their partners—that is, they want to be supportive and constructive toward their partners (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Thus, one partner's compassionate goals elicit increases in the other partner's compassionate goals over time.

Love: Affection and Caregiving

When people find someone whose hopes and dreams they find inspiring and want to support, they may fall in love. In the ecosystem, loving another centers on caring about the other; being loved indicates the opportunity to create a mutually caring and supportive relationship.

Loving. Loving another person in the ecosystem means caring—developing affectional bonds that promote wanting the best for the other; wanting to encourage the other's growth, aspirations, and well-being; and wanting to give to the loved one (S. L. Brown & Brown, 2006; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver, Mikulincer, & Shemesh-Iron, 2010). Thus, love in the ecosystem has elements of compassionate love (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005;

Underwood, 2002). To love in the ecosystem does not require that one win or possess the other, only that one feel an emotional bond that inspires giving. Again, the distinction between wanting and liking is useful (Berridge, 2004b). Thoughts of the loved one, or being in the presence of the loved one, should involve liking more than wanting—that is, the loved one should activate pleasure systems without necessarily activating the motivation to acquire or consume. Consistent with this idea, compassionate love relates more strongly to life satisfaction than does passionate love (Kim & Hatfield, 2004) and does not lead to the intense emotional highs and lows characteristic of passionate love (Underwood, 2002).

Accumulating research findings have indicated that feelings of love in the ecosystem enable people to transcend self-interest (S. L. Brown & Brown, 2006; S. L. Brown et al., 2012; Shaver et al., 2010). Love in the ecosystem activates the caregiving behavioral system (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001; Gonzaga et al., 2006; Shaver & Hazan, 1988; Shaver et al., 2010). Because love involves caring about someone other than oneself and wanting to promote the well-being of others in ways that are good for the self, it fosters personal growth (Aron & Aron, 1986). In roommate dyads, feelings of love and connection are linked to the desire to be supportive and constructive (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Reflecting on important values induces feelings of love and connection, which reduce defensive responses to self-threatening health information (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008).

Being loved. In the ecosystem, being loved means being cared for by a partner who is supportive and responsive (Berscheid, 2010; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Cutrona, 1996; Feeney & Collins, 2001, 2003; Post, Underwood, Schloss, & Hurlbut, 2002; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Being loved affords the opportunity to create a mutually supportive and caring relationship. Perhaps the most important aspect of love in the ecosystem is that people do not wait for another person to love them before they give love; love cannot be earned, won, or stolen. Rather, people create love in the ecosystem by giving

it freely. When freely given, and accompanied by caring, constructive, supportive behavior, others may reciprocate with love and affection.

Satisfaction and Commitment: Negotiating Conflicting Goals and Desires

Once people have found a partner, drawn close, and perhaps fallen in love, they may become committed. In the ecosystem, commitment refers not to the desire for the relationship to last a long time (Rusbult et al., 1998) but rather to the intention to make the relationship good for both partners. Relationship satisfaction depends on the degree to which the relationship is good for both partners—that is, whether partners are mutually supportive and responsive and the relationship promotes the growth and well-being of both partners (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). Thus, commitment is the starting point of need satisfaction, not the outcome. The availability of attractive alternative partners is irrelevant to this form of commitment because people view themselves as the starting point of relationship quality. Thus, in the ecosystem people will not likely remain committed to a relationship that remains bad—that is, not supportive and constructive—for either or both partners.

As in the egosystem, love and commitment in the ecosystem involve interdependence; each partner has the capacity to influence the happiness of the other, for better or worse (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). If both partners are committed to making the relationship good and care for each other's well-being, then conflicts of interest should be relatively infrequent. The success of one partner should not threaten the self-esteem of the other, even when the partner's success occurs in domains that define the self. Incompatibility of preferences, goals, and desires should be less likely, because people have presumably chosen partners whose important goals they wish to support. When differences in goals, desires, and preferences arise, in the ecosystem people search for solutions that are good for both, or at least not harmful to one partner; they do so not to avoid conflict or keep their partner in the relationship but rather because they care about their partner's well-being. Partners should be less likely to behave

badly, acting in ways that are intentionally inconsiderate or annoying. Acts of betrayal, in which one partner humiliates or degrades the other, should be quite rare.

Should conflicts arise, people prioritize both partners' needs equally. Therefore, people will not sacrifice for their partners in ways that harm themselves, nor will they insist on getting their own way if doing so would harm their partners. People in these relationships will not respond to bad behavior with conciliation and accommodation, which may allow the bad behavior to continue and harm one or both partners. Instead, we suggest that they address the issue in a vulnerable, exploratory, and constructive way, attempting to understand the situation from the other's point of view and explaining how it harms them. Similarly, we suggest that in relationships in the ecosystem, people do not simply forgive betrayals. Rather, their commitment to make the relationship good for both people leads them to explore the root causes of the betrayal, including each partner's responsibility for the situation, and address them.

Breaking Up: Leaving and Being Left

In the ecosystem, relationship breakups happen when people determine that the relationship is not good for one or both of the relationship partners, despite commitment to make the relationship good. Thus, we suggest that the distinction between relationships in the egosystem and those in the ecosystem is not whether the relationship lasts or breaks up, but rather the reasons people have for leaving versus staying and how compassionate they are when breaking off a relationship. Because people care about their partner's well-being and their own, and perhaps still love each other, they should feel sad but accepting if the relationship breaks up when it is bad for one or both of the partners, regardless of who initiated the breakup. People who initiate a breakup should consider their partner's well-being without sacrificing their own well-being in the process (Sprecher, Zimmerman, & Abrahams, 2010). Both partners may continue to care about each other after the breakup, and both care about people or things beyond the dyadic relationship. For example, in

relationships in the ecosystem, a couple with children would presumably continue to care about one another's well-being because they both care about the well-being of their children.

Because relationships in the ecosystem are not primarily reflections on the self, breakups should not devastate the self-esteem of the leaver or the one left. Consequently, we predict that self-control failures and destructive impulses are far less likely to follow breakups of relationships in the ecosystem.

Summary

The principles of relationships in the ecosystem differ in a number of ways from the principles of relationships in the egosystem, at every stage of relationship formation, maintenance, and dissolution. Most important, whereas in the egosystem people focus primarily on how well the relationship gratifies their own needs and desires, in the ecosystem they give equal priority to their own needs and those of relationship partners. Consequently, people tend to have non-zero-sum beliefs about the connection between their own well-being and that of their partner. Second, in the ecosystem people feel at the source of constructive relationship processes rather than at the mercy of their relationship partner. Thus, they create vulnerability, trust, and love by giving them freely rather than waiting for their partner to earn them. Third, closeness and love involve affectional bonds that inspire giving to promote the well-being of the relationship partner instead of dependence on the other to gratify one's own important needs and desires. Commitment involves the intention to make the relationship good for the self and the partner rather than determination to make the relationship last, no matter what. Thus, whereas in the egosystem people may stay in relationships that are bad for them or for their partner (or both) because they lack alternatives that would be more gratifying or because they stand to lose resources if the relationship ends, in the ecosystem people will end a relationship if it is harmful to one or both partners and they cannot make it good. Because the self and other are not merged, the self is not lost when the relationship breaks up, so breakups should not devastate self-esteem.

REMAINING ISSUES

We have suggested that the principles governing relationships depend on what motivational system is activated. Relationships motivated by the egosystem follow a set of principles in which the needs of the self take priority over the needs of relationship partners, whereas relationships motivated by the ecosystem follow a different set of principles in which people care about the well-being of relationship partners and give equal priority to the needs of the self and the partner. This framework raises a number of issues for research.

The Shift

Readers may be tempted to characterize their own relationships, or those of their friends and family, as following the principles of the egosystem or the ecosystem. Surely people and relationships differ in how frequently they follow the principles of one system or another (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003; Shaver et al., 2010). However, both people and relationships can shift from one motivational system to the other, with important consequences for relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Feeney & Collins, 2003; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005; Shaver et al., 2010). For example, research has suggested that when attachment security increases, people become more compassionate and more helpful (Mikulincer et al., 2005; Shaver et al., 2010). However, threats to self-esteem decrease concern with the well-being of others (Twenge et al., 2007; Vohs & Heatherton, 2001). Negative emotions such as anxiety and depression predict decreased intentions to be supportive toward close relationship partners (Crocker, Canevello, Breines, & Flynn, 2010). Taken together, findings such as these suggest that ecosystem motivation is activated when people trust that their needs can be met in collaboration with their social environment (including, but not limited to, their relationship partners), whereas egosystem motivation is activated when people lose this trust (Crocker & Canevello, 2012a; Crocker et al., 2009). Individual differences such as insecure attachment

styles and low self-esteem, situational threats to need satisfaction such as stress and self-image threats, and relationship factors such as contagion of interpersonal goals all shape whether a relationship is governed at a particular moment by the principles of the egosystem or those of the ecosystem.

For both theoretical and practical reasons, one of the most important issues still to be resolved is whether people can choose to shift from one motivational system to the other. That is, can people choose to be motivated by the ecosystem even when they are dispositionally insecure, they are situationally threatened, or their relationship partner is governed by the egosystem? We suggest that when people understand that the principles of the ecosystem lead to negative outcomes for themselves, the people they care about, and their relationships, they can choose to respond from the psychological space of the ecosystem instead of the egosystem.

Exploitation

One concern for many people is whether they will be exploited if they are motivated by caring for the well-being of others. It seems logical that people with the impulse to give freely could be taken advantage of (e.g., S. L. Brown & Brown, 2006). However, in the ecosystem commitment refers to the intention to make the relationship last, so people will accommodate bad behavior and forgive betrayals, whereas in the ecosystem giving is typically reciprocated (Canevello & Crocker, 2010; Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Thus, it seems possible that exploitation is just as much, or even more, a risk in relationships in the egosystem.

Generalizing to Other Types of Relationships

We have elaborated the idea that there are two sets of fundamental principles of relationships—one describing relationships in the egosystem and the other describing relationships in the ecosystem, using romantic relationships as an illustration. However, we see no reason why this distinction, and many if not all of the fundamental principles we describe, cannot apply to other types of relationships as well. For example, in our own research we have begun to apply this distinction to

work relationships; one can easily imagine, for example, that relationships between peers or between supervisor and subordinate could be characterized as following egosystem or ecosystem principles. In our own work, we have demonstrated the utility of this perspective in understanding relationships of roommate dyads in the first semester of college.

Cultural Differences

Although the distinction between egosystem and ecosystem motivation in relationships may be important in the U.S. and other Western cultures, the relevance of this distinction in non-Western cultures characterized by interdependent selves remains unclear. Interdependent self-construals are flexible, variable self-conceptions that emphasize external, public features such as statuses, belonging and fitting in, occupying one's proper place, and indirectness in communication (Singelis, 1994). In cultures that emphasize interdependence, the self is defined within specific social contexts, connected to and overlapping with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People in collectivistic cultures such as Japan tend to give priority to communal goals over personal goals (Yamaguchi, 1994) and to value empathy (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). These findings suggest that people in collectivistic cultures may generally have ecosystem motivations in relationships; egosystem motivation may be less important in collectivist cultures because people assume that their needs will be met in collaboration with others.

However, research in one collectivist culture, Japan, shows that the Japanese do enhance their positive self-images (J. D. Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Kurman, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; Takata, 2003) and validate their self-worth indirectly through others (Dalsky, Gohm, Noguchi, & Shiomura, 2008). Research on the concept of face suggests that maintaining and restoring public images of the self are crucial elements of Japanese interactions (Hamamura & Heine, 2008; Heine, 2005). These findings suggest that people in collectivist cultures do care about impression management and have egosystem motivation in relationships, even if the specific

form of egosystem motivation varies by culture. For example, people in collectivist cultures may not only give priority to communal goals over personal goals, they may also want to manage others' impressions of them as appropriately prioritizing collective goals to ensure that others have high regard for them. Thus, even in collectivist cultures characterized by interdependent selves, people may have either egosystem or ecosystem motivation in their close relationships (Niiya, Crocker, & Mischkowski, 2013).

CONCLUSION

As do other social scientists, relationship scientists typically assume that people are fundamentally self-interested; they do what they perceive to be advantageous to themselves (Miller, 1999). Although people are surely capable of being self-interested in their close relationships, people also have the capacity to transcend self-interest and to care deeply about people and things beyond themselves. This capacity extends to close relationships, in which people driven by ecosystem motivation seek to promote the well-being of others not out of selfish motives to obtain benefits in return, but because they care about them or because both people care about the well-being of someone or something beyond themselves. They create mutually supportive relationships because they care about their partners, and they dissolve them when the relationship is bad for one or both of them.

Although research on ecosystem motivation in relationships is relatively scarce, existing research has suggested that relationships in the ecosystem are qualitatively different, following a different set of governing principles than relationships in the egosystem. We suggest that relationship researchers more clearly articulate their assumptions about the motivations guiding the phenomena they study. Identifying the conditions under which relationship behaviors are driven by one motivational system or another, the consequences of these systems for relationships and the people in them, and whether people can choose to shift from one system or another are urgent priorities for future research.

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