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C. Raymond Knee¹, Benjamin W. Hadden¹, Ben Porter¹, and Lindsey M. Rodriguez¹

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Abstract

Self-determination theory can be viewed as a theory of optimal relationship development and functioning. We examine the concept of self that is employed in self-determination theory and explain how its unique definition allows an important and novel characterization of investing one's "self" in romantic relationships. A self-determined perspective on romantic relationships integrates several theories on romantic relationship development, but also goes beyond them by explicitly articulating the personality, developmental, and situational factors that facilitate optimal self-investment and relational functioning. Self-determination promotes openness rather than defensiveness and facilitates perspective-taking, authenticity, and support of close others. The dyadic context of romantic relationships affords great opportunity for theoretical development and integration of self-determination theory with current theories of interdependence and relational well-being.

Keywords

self-determination, romantic, relationships, autonomy, self

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 2000, 2008) is known as a theory of motivation that incorporates personality, developmental, and situational influences on optimal individual psychological well-being. Recent work argues that it is also fundamentally a theory of optimal relationship development and functioning (Knee, Porter, & Rodriguez, in press; La Guardia & Patrick, 2008). We examine the concept of self that is employed in self-determination theory and explain how its unique definition affords an important and novel characterization of investing one's "self" in romantic relationships. A self-determined perspective on romantic relationships integrates several theories on romantic relationship development, but also fundamentally goes beyond them by explicitly articulating the personality, developmental, and situational factors that facilitate optimal self-investment and relational functioning.

A key aspect of self-determination theory is the distinction made between parts of the self that are regulated by extrinsic incentives, inner pressures, expectations, and demands versus those that are regulated by intrinsic interests, awareness of needs, and genuine core-self involvement. Whereas many theories on the self view that which is "inside the person" as "self," self-determination theory focuses on what is functionally motivating the behavior, and recognizes that although many behaviors originate from within the person, they do not all equally reflect core-self involvement.

What is Meant by Self-Determination?

According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985b, 2000, 2008), being self-determined means that one's actions are relatively autonomous, freely chosen, and fully endorsed by the person rather than coerced or pressured by external forces or internal expectations. This definition emphasizes authenticity of choices and behaviors that are congruent with one's needs, a mindful, reflective awareness of those needs, and the capacity of one's social environment to support them. Self-determination theory's concept of self is based on the active integrative processes that underlie human psychological development akin to what Piaget (1971) termed the organization principle, and what Rogers (1951) termed the actualizing tendency (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 1995). As development proceeds, behaviors are integrated to varying degrees such that some become more a part of one's identity than do others. At the heart of this process is what Deci and Ryan refer to as "organismic integration," whereby behaviors and identities are adopted and come to reflect one's self-concept to different degrees,

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depending on how well they fulfill basic psychological needs of the person and how well the environment surrounding those behaviors and identities supports them as well. The “self” in self-determination theory thus refers to that part of who one is that has been more fully internalized and adopted and endorsed by the person as part of his or her identity. This is sometimes referred to as “core self,” “true self,” or “integrated self” in the literature. Hereon, we will use the term *true self* to mean the self-determination theory definition of self. It is this definition that we will compare and contrast with other dominant perspectives on close relationships.

Within romantic relationships, self-determination refers to endorsing one’s own involvement in the relationship fully, rather than feeling coerced, guilty, or not knowing why one is involved in the relationship (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005). In this article, we focus on research that is particularly relevant to regulation of romantic relationships, and the measures and manipulations of self-determination employed in those studies. Self-determination has been operationalized in several ways, depending on the particular study, the level of analysis, and the domain of research.

The Continuum of Self-Determined Motivation

Imagine that a boisterous, overbearing but glamorous pig becomes involved with a mild-mannered, kind-hearted, but somewhat unconfident frog. Miss Piggy is motivated to be in the relationship because of its popularity in the eyes of others, the tabloid attention and admirers it provides, and the feelings of guilt and shame that might emerge if she were to end the relationship. Kermit, on the other hand, is motivated to be in the relationship because he values the way they relate and understand each other’s needs, and because he feels that he can fully express his core self in her presence without suppressing, editing, or pretending to be something other than himself. Whereas Piggy’s involvement is largely motivated by extrinsic incentives and internal demands, Kermit’s involvement is largely motivated by intrinsic values and the experience of genuine self-expression in Piggy’s presence.

A key principle of self-determination theory is that not all enacted behaviors are regulated by the true self. As mentioned earlier, behaviors can be placed along a regulation continuum from those that are almost entirely *not* regulated by the true self to those that are almost entirely determined by the true self. The distinction at the various levels concerns the degree to which the regulated behavior has become integrated into one’s sense of identity. At the far end of the continuum, behaviors that are amotivated lack intention. These are behaviors for which people do not know why they do them—they just go through the motions. There is largely no self-involvement and this is considered nonregulation. For example, if Piggy has no idea why she is in her relationship

with Kermit, her involvement would be relatively unregulated by the self and thus amotivated. At the next point on the continuum, behavior can be externally motivated, whereby the person’s reason for doing the behavior is to satisfy some external demand or social expectation. For example, if Piggy is in the relationship because her family would be terribly upset with her if she were single, then her involvement is being regulated by pressures and demands from significant others. Behaviors that are enacted out of internal pressures and expectations are one step more internalized within the true self because the expectations are now largely “in one’s head,” but the origin of regulation still remains outside of the true self. At this level, behaviors are introjected in that their regulation has been partly internalized, but not fully accepted by the person. Introjected behaviors are enacted out of guilt and shame or to satisfy ego-related concerns about one’s image or popularity or worth. For example, if Piggy was involved with Kermit because she would feel guilty if she ended it, then her behavior is being regulated by those internal pressures and expectations. Introjected regulations can be quite controlling and engender tension and anxiety surrounding the behavior.

Behaviors become more reflective and expressive of true self to the degree that they involve valuing and acceptance of the behavior as being important to one’s identity. Thus, identified regulations are enacted out of their importance, self-acceptance, and self-endorsement. For example, if Kermit is in the relationship because he feels that he chooses to be with Piggy and he values their involvement and plans for the future, then he identifies with that regulation. Regulations can be further integrated into one’s true self when they resonate with higher order or overarching identities. For example, if Kermit has a core principle to improve and grow, and he feels that being in the relationship with Piggy facilitates this self-expression and growth, then his involvement is integrated and relatively self-determined. Finally, behaviors can be regulated by the true self in the fullest, most unobtrusive sense when they are intrinsically motivated, meaning that they are simply enjoyable and enacted for only the spontaneous positive feelings that are not separable from the behavior itself. For example, Kermit might be involved with Piggy because of the many fun and exciting times they share together. The time, effort, and resources spent on the relationship with Piggy are not a means to an end but rather an end in and of themselves.

Thus, according to self-determination theory, not all forms of investment in one’s activities, including one’s relationships, are equal (Deci & Ryan, 2000). They vary in terms of how much they involve one’s true self and identity. Furthermore, those pursuits that are more fully self-aware, self-expressive, and true-self-involved come with a number of advantages (Sheldon, Ryan, Deci, & Kasser, 2004). Self-determined involvement promotes openness rather than defensiveness and facilitates perspective-taking, flexibility, honesty and authenticity, awareness of needs and support of

close others, and relational well-being (Hodgins & Knee, 2002).

According to the hierarchical model of motivation (Vallerand, 1997), self-determination can be operationalized at hierarchically ordered levels, from general disposition levels (such as trait autonomy) to situational, domain-specific levels (such as relationship autonomy) to event-specific levels (autonomy with regard to a particular task). Thus, although dispositional self-determination predicts specific relationship processes and outcomes, it is likely that the effect is largely mediated by the degree of relationship autonomy in that particular relationship context. Specifically, self-determined motivation for a particular behavior is to some degree determined by one's general disposition, by domain-specific levels of motivation, and even by one's motivation for the specific task or behavior. Self-determination has been operationalized at each of these levels, depending on the research focus. Below we review self-determined motivation at the levels of general dispositions and within the specific domain of close relationships.

Dispositional Motivation

From an individual difference perspective, self-determination has been operationalized as causality orientations, which are relatively stable individual differences in how one orients toward the social environment (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 2002). They are called "causality" orientations because they refer to the perceived locus of causality for one's behavior. These orientations roughly reflect the variation found along the self-determined regulation continuum described hereinbefore, expressed at an individual difference level (rather than a situational or event-specific level). Causality orientations (i.e., autonomy, controlled, and impersonal) are thought to broadly influence the regulation of behavior, and the three orientations vary in the degree to which they reflect self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985a). They are said to derive from the interaction between basic psychological needs and the social contexts that support or thwart those needs. Autonomy orientation involves regulating behavior according to one's interests and self-endorsed values. Controlled orientation reflects a tendency to become ego-involved in one's daily experiences and to regulate behavior according to external and internalized controls, pressures, expectations, and demands. Impersonal orientation involves a general sense of amotivation, a lack of intention, and feeling despondent and ineffective. General causality orientations have been studied in relation to interpersonal defensiveness, explanations for social offenses, empathy and taking another's point of view, as well as coping strategies and observed behavior during romantic relationship conflict (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Hodgins, Liebeskind, & Schwartz, 1996; Knee, Patrick, Vietor, Nanayakkara, & Neighbors, 2002). Each person is thought to possess some level of each orientation to varying degrees.

Causality orientations predict responses to conflict and coping strategies in romantic relationships. For example, Knee et al. (2002) videotaped couples in a semistructured interview designed to emphasize differences in how partners view the relationship. Autonomy orientation was associated with more relationship-maintaining coping strategies, whereas controlled orientation was associated with more denial. During the discussion, autonomy orientation was associated with less negative emotions and more positive behaviors, whereas controlled orientation was associated with fewer positive behaviors.

Sometimes, researchers have focused on trait self-determination rather than general causality orientations. For example, the Self-Determination Scale (Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996) was designed to assess individual differences in the extent to which people tend to function in a self-determined way. It measures (a) being more aware of one's feelings and identity, and (b) feeling a sense of choice with respect to one's behavior. Trait self-determination has been examined in relation to understanding versus defensive coping responses to reported, daily experienced, and laboratory-induced conflicts in romantic relationships (Knee et al., 2005). For example, trait self-determination predicted self-determined motivation for being in the relationship which, in turn, predicted more understanding and less defensive responses to conflict.

Self-Determined Motivation in Romantic Relationships

Self-determination has also been operationalized as having more self-determined reasons for being in the relationship (Blais, Sabourin, Boucher, & Vallerand, 1990). The Couple Motivation Questionnaire (Blais et al., 1990) assesses people's autonomy in terms of their reasons for being in the relationship. The questionnaire begins with the stem, "Why are you in the relationship?" Each of the 18 items then provides a reason for being in the relationship that varies along a continuum from those that are less self-determined (e.g., "There is nothing motivating me to stay in my relationship with my partner") to more self-determined (e.g., "Because I value the way my relationship with my partner allows me to improve myself as a person"). Relationship autonomy (being in the relationship for relatively more self-determined reasons) predicts perceived agreement between partners, which, in turn, predicts relationship satisfaction for men and women (Blais et al., 1990), as well as more understanding, and fewer defensive behaviors during actual couple conflicts (Knee et al., 2005). Furthermore, one's partner's degree of relationship autonomy (as well as one's own) predicts relationship outcomes. One's own and one's partner's levels of relationship autonomy uniquely and simultaneously predict less defensive responses and, in turn, greater relative satisfaction after disagreements. Thus, having more integrated and self-determined reasons for being in the relationship benefits both partners.

In an attempt to assess self-determined motivation at a more specific level, Gaine and La Guardia (2009) examined motivation toward specific relationship activities such as physical intimacy, self-disclosure, and social support. Results showed that motivation for specific relationship activities uniquely predicted relationship well-being beyond reasons for being in one's relationship, which together accounted for 80% of the variance in relationship well-being. According to self-determination theory, where one's motivation falls along the continuum derives from the interaction between basic psychological needs and the social environments that support or thwart them. Before we review how the relationship context can facilitate or undermine self-determined motivation, we turn to a discussion of basic psychological needs.

Psychological Need Support

In self-determination theory, needs specify "innate psychological nutrients that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). According to self-determination theory, optimal psychological health and well-being emerge from the satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Need for autonomy reflects the need to feel that one's behavior is personally endorsed and initiated, acting from integrated values (Angyal, 1965; Deci, 1980; Deci & Ryan, 2000), and is analogous to what deCharms (1968) referred to as having a perceived locus of causality, distinguishing between "origins" and pawns." Compared with origins, pawns do not feel as if they are the origins of their behavior, and they do not experience a sense of being fully engaged in their actions.

Need for competence reflects the need to feel competent and effective at what one does. A broad literature has supported the importance of ongoing feelings of competence for optimal functioning and well-being. For example, White (1959) theorized that feeling competent is an integral contributor to self-confidence. Bandura's (1977) work on self-efficacy has shown that believing that one can bring about desired outcomes is an important determinant of psychological health. Furthermore, Carver and Scheier (1990) have shown that believing that one is effectively making progress toward one's goals is psychologically beneficial. Early experiments suggested a need for competence in that positive feedback was found to enhance intrinsic motivation (compared with no feedback), whereas negative feedback was found to undermine intrinsic motivation (compared with no feedback; see Deci & Ryan, 1980, for review).

Need for relatedness reflects the need to experience a sense of belonging, attachment, and intimacy with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Baumeister and Leary (1995) referred to this as the need to belong, and they reviewed extensive evidence on belongingness as a vital human motivation. Need for relatedness also derives from perspectives on intimacy and closeness (Reis & Patrick, 1996). For example,

Reis and Patrick (1996) defined intimacy in terms of feeling understood, validated, and cared for, and research has shown that experiencing these aspects of intimacy results in optimum psychological and relationship functioning. Need for relatedness also captures what the literature on attachment and felt security has suggested is important for optimal relational development (Bowlby, 1969).

Support of these basic psychological needs facilitates development of self-determined motivation. Importantly, individuals' social environments—their caregivers, romantic partners, teachers, friends, families, and larger social ties—can provide ongoing support for these needs to varying degrees. These social supports, and individuals' negotiation among them for psychological need fulfillment, come to define the degree of self-determined motivation for activities and determine where one's behavior falls along the motivation continuum. Empirical support for this process comes from studies indicating that, for example, people are more securely attached to, and more likely to emotionally rely on, those who meet their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005), and that fulfillment of these psychological needs predicts general well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon et al., 1996), and relational well-being (Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). In addition, individuals' perceptions that their friends support their autonomy strivings predict greater overall need satisfaction and positive relationship quality (Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006). Furthermore, both partners' levels of need fulfillment uniquely predict one's own relationship functioning and well-being. Finally, those who experience greater need fulfillment within their romantic relationship show better relationship quality after disagreements due to their tendency to have more self-determined reasons for being in the relationship (Patrick et al., 2007). For romantic relationships, this basic psychological needs perspective suggests that quality close relationships involve more than simply feeling satisfied with them. Relational well-being is thought to emerge when the relationship context supports the basic needs of both partners, promoting autonomous motivation for being in the relationship, which in turn facilitates how the couple approaches and manages disagreements and conflicts (Patrick et al., 2007).

What Autonomy is Not

Self-determination theory's concept of autonomy has at times been confused with concepts such as independence or detachment. This confusion is partly due to H. A. Murray's (1938) traditional definition of autonomy as resisting influence and striving for independence. More recent perspectives have also defined autonomy in terms of independence from others (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996) or as detachment (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986) rather than volition. To

clarify empirically how self-determination theory's notion of autonomy differs from detachment, Ryan and Lynch (1989) conducted three studies showing that autonomy among teenagers involves acceptance by and reliance on parents rather than detachment from them. With regard to independence, Koestner et al. (1999) articulately distinguished Murray's conception of autonomy from self-determination theory's conception theoretically and empirically. They dubbed the Murray conception as "reactive" autonomy and the Deci and Ryan version as "reflective autonomy," and discovered that these variants of autonomy are only weakly correlated and are associated with divergent behaviors (Koestner et al., 1999; Koestner & Losier, 1996). As expected, Deci and Ryan's reflective autonomy predicted more positive thoughts on a daily basis as well as better mood regulation, more intimate and pleasurable interactions with peers, and more openness to expert advice, compared with reactive autonomy. Along the same lines, other research has found that autonomy as defined in self-determination theory predicts more satisfying and honest interactions with family and friends (Hodgins, Liebeskind, et al., 1996) and fewer attempts to "save face" and blame others when awkward social events occur (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Hodgins, Liebeskind, et al., 1996).

The self in self-determination theory, as mentioned earlier, is characterized by degrees of internalization and degrees of self-determined regulation. This continuum distinguishes ways of being involved and invested in one's relationship half-heartedly, in pressured ways or out of guilt, versus being fully involved, open, aware, reflective, and flexible. This process can be supported or thwarted at various levels—at the level of the individual, the situation or context of the relationship, and the unique interaction between the particular people in the particular context. At all levels, one's needs and true self can be supported or thwarted to varying degrees.

Self-determination theory's perspective on autonomous functioning and true-self involvement in one's endeavors can be extended to a number of close relationship theories to offer a more complete understanding of optimal self-investment and relational functioning. According to self-determination theory, some ways of investing oneself are more optimal than others. A more self-determined, integrated, authentic, true-self involvement in one's relationship likely promotes secure attachments, empathic awareness and support of others' needs, and a less defensive stance during conflict in oneself and one's partner. We now examine several theories of close relationships and note how self-determination theory goes beyond them by explicitly conveying the personality, developmental, and situational factors that facilitate optimal true self-involvement and relational functioning. In viewing these theories from a self-determination perspective, we also emphasize features that can be integrated across them, and in so doing, offer a common theoretical thread in terms of self-determined regulation in close relationships. The list of theories explored is not exhaustive—we emphasize those whose

concepts, themes, and mechanics that can be integrated with self-determination theory.

Close Relationship Theories, Concepts, and Perspectives

Attachment

One of the most widely studied theories on close relationships is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; see Rholes & Simpson, 2004, for review), which considers felt security as essential for maintaining secure attachments to close others. Attachment theory incorporates situational, individual, and interactional influences on the development of felt security in relation to close others. Its concept of working models explains how past relational experiences become incorporated into the person cognitively and emotionally, and in turn, guide and influence relational perceptions, behaviors, and experiences. In addition, its conception of attachment and caregiving systems helps explain how self-focus inhibits responsiveness to one's partner. In this way, attachment theory spells out the processes whereby attachments to close others develop and change over time, largely as a function of the relational context in which they emerge.

Most of the research on attachment theory in adult relationships has focused on the attachment system, which functions to ensure that individuals maintain proximity to others to facilitate safety and security. Whereas attachment theory primarily relies on felt security and feelings of relatedness in accounting for different styles of attachment, self-determination theory suggests that variations in the fulfillment of all three needs—competence, autonomy, and relatedness—in the relational context likely determine levels of felt security and qualities of attachment to close others (La Guardia et al., 2000).

Although the attachment system has received most of researchers' focus, the caregiving system is also important. Whereas the attachment system is responsible for ensuring that one's needs are fulfilled, the caregiving system functions to alert people to the needs of close others and serves two primary functions (Collins & Ford, 2010). It monitors signals of distress from partners to lead others to provide them with a "safe haven," as well as provides a "secure base" by encouraging partners' autonomous exploration when there is no threat. In other words, under normal conditions, the caregiving system motivates appropriate responses to partners' needs (Collins & Ford, 2010). However, when partners do not respond appropriately, people tend to form more anxious or avoidant attachment bonds (Feeney, 2004; Feeney & Thrush, 2010).

Attachment and caregiving can be conceptualized, and perhaps clarified, by a discussion of basic psychological need fulfillment (La Guardia et al., 2000). To provide a secure base, one must be supportive and responsive to one's partner while allowing one's partner to explore freely

(Feeney & Thrush, 2010). Essentially, one must support feelings of autonomy and competence to promote free, spontaneous exploration, while also fulfilling a sense of relatedness and security. In stressful situations, a similar conceptualization applies: One must provide a sense of connectedness and support while also supporting the partner's competence and ability to handle the situation effectively. The degree to which partners fulfill the roles of "secure base" and "safe haven" should further influence the formation of secure attachment bonds. Indeed, people are more securely attached to people who they perceive as fulfilling their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (La Guardia et al., 2000). More importantly, La Guardia and her colleagues found that approximately one third of the variance in attachment security occurred at the between-person level, and that one's degree of autonomy and competence need fulfillment at the within-person level predicted significant variance in attachment security within various close relationships. Furthermore, Deci et al. (2006) found that when one individual in a close relationship is autonomy supportive of the partner, it enhances relational well-being of both individuals. Thus, people benefit by attending to their partners' needs.

Need satisfaction has been associated with secure attachment, but alternatively, attachment anxiety can also lead to situations in which one's needs are not fulfilled. Slotter and Finkel (2009) investigated links between attachment anxiety and need fulfillment in predicting commitment. In two studies, they found an interaction between attachment anxiety and fulfillment of autonomy and relatedness needs in predicting commitment. Whether attachment anxiety was primed experimentally or assessed as a trait, elevated attachment anxiety led individuals to remain committed to the relationship even when needs for relatedness and autonomy were relatively unfulfilled. In contrast, experiencing elevated attachment security led individuals to adjust their level of commitment in accord with the level of need fulfillment. Thus, attachment security predicts level of commitment primarily when people are also experiencing fulfillment of psychological needs within the relationship.

In summary, attachment and self-determination theories posit individual differences. In the case of attachment theory, the attachment orientations result from the degree to which the basic need for relatedness is fulfilled or thwarted, whereas in self-determination theory it is the degree to which the three needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are fulfilled versus thwarted. Thus, self-determination theory elaborates what "responsiveness" means (the fulfillment of the three psychological needs) and recognizes that need satisfaction operates significantly at a contemporaneous level as well as developmentally over time. Further research integrating attachment and self-determination perspectives along these lines is an important next step.

Returning to our example, Miss Piggy, being more controlled in her motivation, is less likely to provide the ingredients

of a secure base. She is less likely to be autonomy supportive by allowing Kermit to freely pursue his own exploration. Rather, she is more likely to psychologically restrain him, hover over him, constantly monitor and evaluate, trying to make him do things according to her preferred way.

Self-Expansion Theory

Self-expansion theory (Aron & Aron, 1996; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) assumes that the desire to grow and expand is a fundamental motivation and that people are motivated to expand their resources, perspectives, and characteristics by including close others within the self-concept. The theory emphasizes that satisfying romantic relationships are those in which partners engage in novel and challenging activities to satisfy this fundamental desire to grow and expand. Sometimes, as a relationship progresses, fewer opportunities to engage in exciting experiences are available, at which point self-expansion is thwarted and feelings of boredom and dissatisfaction can emerge (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000). There is considerable empirical evidence of this process. For example, self-expansion theory says that individuals assimilate the traits and characteristics of the partner into their self-concept, as a natural ongoing process of developing a close and intimate relationship. Several experiments have found that people allocate resources to a close other as they would to themselves instead of as they would to a stranger, and tend to process information about close others as if it is about themselves (Aron et al., 1991).

In relation to self-determination theory, a few points are worth noting. First, activities that support basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are likely to also facilitate true self-development and true self-expansion. For example, self-determination theory emphasizes that optimally challenging tasks best support one's need for competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). If an activity is too easy or too difficult, people lose interest either from boredom or capitulation. Thus, some activities might expand the self-concept more readily than others. Activities that undermine one's autonomy, thwart one's competence by being too easy or too challenging, or hinder rather than facilitate relatedness would likely result in less true self-expansion. That said, self-expansion theory largely refers to expansion of the self-concept, whereas self-determination theory refers specifically to development and integration (and likely expansion) of the true self, largely irrespective of one's self-concept. In fact, the extent to which one's true self and one's self-concept are concordant might be considered one indicator of optimal psychological development, from a self-determination theory perspective.

Second, self-expansion and the sense of closeness that derives from including another within one's self-concept seem to reflect self-determination theory's need for relatedness. Self-expansion theory does not directly address needs

for autonomy and competence other than suggesting that challenging, novel activities promote self-expansion, which may indirectly facilitate a sense of competence. Third, self-expansion theory concerns the way in which close others' behaviors, resources, and characteristics are internalized into one's own self-concept. Self-expansion theory does not explicitly discuss different qualities of self-concept expansion, whereas self-determination theory explicitly acknowledges and discusses optimal ways to develop the true self, irrespective of one's self-concept, via its notion of the continuum of true self-determined motivation. In other words, self-expansion theory suggests that people are motivated to expand the self-concept but does not distinguish between more and less self-determined expansion. Not all motivations for relating and expanding one's self-concept are equal. Seeking closeness from a partner to acquire resources (e.g., fame, approval from others, monetary gains) is a less self-determined form of motivation than seeking closeness to learn new perspectives and grow with one's partner. Whereas self-expansion theory suggests that both motivations satisfy the desire for self-expansion, self-determination theory predicts that self-determined motivations are of greater benefit than less self-determined motivations.

Another way that self-determination theory extends self-expansion theory is through the concept of relationship-contingent self-esteem. Described in detail below, this refers to an unhealthy form of self-esteem that involves depending heavily on one's romantic relationship for self-validation. In terms of self-determination theory, relationship-contingent self-esteem reflects less integrated regulation in which one is involved in the relationship for reasons other than an expression of one's true-self. In essence, relationship-contingent self-esteem might be one example of where self-expansion occurs for introjected and extrinsic reasons. Recent work by Linardatos and Lydon (2011) suggests that identifying more strongly with one's romantic relationship is associated with more automated pro-relationship responses to relationship threats. Their construct of relationship-specific identification (e.g., "My current romantic relationship is an important reflection of who I am") seems similar to inclusion of other in one's self-concept. In four studies, they found support for the idea that relationship-specific identification is associated with relationship maintenance behaviors, particularly those that are relatively spontaneous and that occur in the face of relational threat.

Other recent work is even more relevant to the idea that not all forms of inclusion of other into one's self-concept are equally beneficial. Weinstein, Rodriguez, Knee, and Kumashiro (2013) examined whether individual differences in self-determined motivation moderate the effects of increasing self-other overlap on partner outcomes. Study methods included experimental, cross-sectional, and longitudinal designs, and all studies tested dyads to examine partner effects. Across studies, as self-determined individuals reported greater self-other overlap, their partners reported

receiving more positive motivational support as well as enhanced well-being and relationship outcomes. On the other hand, when individuals were lower in self-determination, their partners reported either no or negative consequences from having greater self-other overlap. Future research could examine whether these findings replicate using laboratory or diary methods with manipulations of self-other overlap and self-determination, and with measurements of partner behavior or physiological responses to conflict.

Returning to our example, Kermit has probably integrated Piggy's identity into his own. He has incorporated her into his self-concept more fully and has come to appreciate the expanded knowledge, perspectives, and fun, novel challenges that come with integrated closeness. He enjoys doing the things she does and considers them to be a cohesive unit. Alternatively, Piggy feels close to Kermit because of the shared activities that they do together and the resources that the relationship provides for her, but her experience of closeness is self-validating rather than a reflection of her true self. They likely experience different relationship identities in accord with their different degrees of self-determined intimacy.

Contingent Self-Worth

There is more to self-esteem than whether it is simply high or low (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989). For example, research on stability of self-esteem has shown that people with high self-esteem that is unstable over time are more angry and aggressive than people with low self-esteem (Kernis & Waschull, 1995; see Kernis, 2003, for review). Self-esteem that is unstable over time is likely to be contingent (Deci & Ryan, 1995), which refers to feelings about oneself that result from and are dependent on matching standards or living up to expectations (of either oneself or others). As articulated by Deci and Ryan (1995, p. 32), contingent self-esteem has one "anxiously focused on one's own agenda, whether that agenda is being feminine, famous, fashionable, fabulously wealthy, or far out."

The pursuit of self-esteem for its own sake is thought to be harmful for the creation and maintenance of close relationships, mainly because focusing on outcomes for oneself interferes with the ability to focus on the needs of others (for reviews, see Crocker & Park, 2004, and Park, Crocker, & Vohs, 2006). It can also lead to behaviors that lead others to distance themselves and thus undermine close relationships. For example, individuals are less supportive toward partners when they receive negative feedback only if their self-esteem is tied to the feedback (Park & Crocker, 2005), and this defensive process tends to lead to expectations of and heightened sensitivity to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996). In addition, in contrast to the benefits of noncontingent self-esteem, when self-worth is contingent within a particular domain, success or failure in that domain, or even cues that might imply success or failure, can result in intense affect

and extreme fluctuations in self-esteem that carry over to evaluations of oneself as globally “good” or “bad.” Relationship-contingent self-esteem refers to self-esteem that is closely tied to one’s success or failure in a romantic relationship (Knee, Canevello, Bush, & Cook, 2008). When higher in relationship-contingent self-esteem, people are more reactive in response to disagreements and conflicts, even small, insignificant ones, because of what those events imply about them. On the surface, it might seem impossible for self-esteem to not be contingent on something. Even in self-determination theory, self-esteem is said to derive from satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and therefore, self-esteem is contingent in even this case. However, this is not what is meant by contingent self-esteem because psychological needs are considered fundamental and irreducible nutrients, whereas contingencies concern largely extrinsic attributes that are not an end in and of themselves but rather tend to function as need-substitutes. For example, if the need for relatedness is chronically thwarted, people might compensate by seeking approval, popularity, or fame as indirect evidence that they are valued and belong (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This approval-seeking would be a manifestation of contingent self-esteem because self-esteem is being questioned, and one is seeking evidence of living up to some extrinsic standard or outcome.

According to self-determination theory, fulfilling basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness over time promotes a noncontingent, intrinsic sense of self-worth that is based on “being who one is rather than what one does” (Hodgins, 2008). However, when these psychological needs are thwarted over time, a fragile, dependent sense of self develops—that one is not intrinsically valuable but rather is judged to be worthy based on how well one performs in certain domains. Hodgins, Brown, and Carver (2007) tested whether experimentally primed autonomous and controlled orientations influence implicit self-esteem in two studies, using a reaction time measure of implicit self-esteem that is based on subliminal stimuli. Implicit self-esteem may be more likely to reflect true or genuine self-esteem because, unlike self-report measures of self-esteem, its measurement bypasses conscious awareness and thus cannot be defensively bolstered. As expected, the results showed that inducing a controlled orientation decreased implicit self-esteem relative to inducing an autonomous orientation. Presumably, a controlled orientation facilitates contingent self-esteem because it causes people to question their ability and worth. When self-esteem is contingent, the highs that one experiences upon acquiring contingent outcomes are less potent than the lows that one experiences when failing to acquire contingent outcomes (Crocker & Park, 2004).

In romantic relationships, relationship-contingent self-esteem involves depending heavily on one’s romantic relationship for self-validation. Relationship-contingent self-esteem is thought to derive partly from thwarted autonomy and

lack of personal endorsement of one’s involvement in the relationship, thwarted competence in one’s relationship, and not feeling genuinely validated, cared for, and understood by one’s partner. When these three needs are thwarted, people become defensive in their relationship interactions as their sense of worth is threatened by negative evaluation and feedback (Patrick et al., 2007). Support for these notions comes from four studies conducted by Knee and his colleagues (Knee et al., 2008) that assessed relationship-contingent self-esteem and examined daily reports of emotions and self-esteem over time, as a function of positive and negative events in the relationship. Study 1 found that people who were higher in relationship-contingent self-esteem were also higher in other domains of contingent self-esteem, self-consciousness, social anxiety, attachment anxiety, manic and selfless love styles, and negative affect, and tended to view situations as more controlling and hopeless. Studies 2 and 3 employed an event-contingent diary procedure to examine reports of self-esteem as a function of everyday relationship events. Results showed a stronger association between the valence of relationship events (positive versus negative) and changes in daily self-esteem, among those higher in relationship-contingent self-esteem. In other words, when one’s self-esteem is highly contingent on the relationship, it fluctuates more with positive and negative relationship experiences. When self-esteem is contingent on one’s relationship, emotions related to those events and outcomes are experienced *reflexively* instead of *reflectively*, and in turn carry over to affect one’s view of self as “good” or “bad.” This does not imply that some moderate level of relationship-contingent self-esteem is a good thing. On the contrary, no evidence emerged for quadratic associations with outcomes such that a moderate level was associated with benefits, whereas low or high levels predicted detriments (Knee et al., 2008). We also do not suggest that the essential problem with contingent self-esteem is over-generalization of negative outcomes that carry over to influence self-worth. Rather, the issue is that contingent self-esteem focuses people on their own agendas rather than the process of relating interdependently in a manner that is mutually need-fulfilling. To sum up, this line of work on relationship-contingent self-esteem suggests that a relatively more self-determined orientation to romantic relationships facilitates stability of self-esteem and emotional reactions to disagreements and conflicts on a daily basis.

Returning to our example, Miss Piggy might lash out unexpectedly when Kermit suggests that she is being too distant. With her self-esteem being relatively contingent on the relationship, and thus the relationship’s quality reflecting her value as a person, she is likely to respond reactively rather than reflexively to potentially evaluative information. Her emotions may fluctuate more on a daily basis in response to even relatively small ups and downs in the relationship.

Interpersonal Goals

Goals have been examined from a self-determination perspective. For example, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations and found links to need satisfaction and psychological well-being. Intrinsic aspirations refer to life goals such as affiliation, personal growth, and community contribution, whereas extrinsic aspirations refer to goals such as attaining wealth, fame, and image. Extrinsic goals are based on obtaining contingent approval from others or acquiring external indicators of worth compared with intrinsic goals, and thus are less directly linked to satisfaction of psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Indeed, Kasser and Ryan (1993, 1996) found that people who placed relatively strong emphasis on extrinsic goals had poorer well-being. Additional studies found that the relative valuing of extrinsic aspirations and pursuing those goals for more extrinsic reasons independently contributed to poorer well-being (Sheldon et al., 2004). Finally, there is evidence that thwarted need satisfaction is linked to having more extrinsic goals. For example, Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995) found that adolescents who placed higher importance on attaining wealth had been raised in environments that were less supportive of autonomy and relatedness.

Recent work on contingent self-worth has identified two types of interpersonal goals—compassionate and self-image goals (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Self-image goals are defined by a focus on developing or maintaining a desired image for oneself or others. It has been proposed that people hold self-image goals if their sense of self-esteem is tied to performance in a given domain (Park & Crocker, 2008). Compassionate goals, on the other hand, are defined by a desire to support others for their own sake, rather than for attaining a benefit for oneself. It is important to note that interpersonal goals focus on one's intentions rather than on the outcome of the behavior itself. For example, according to research on interpersonal goals, buying flowers for a significant other, while a nice gesture, is less important than the purpose of buying those flowers.

Self-determination theory suggests that self-image goals arise from low need fulfillment, which is also crucial to the development of a coherent, integrated sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000). That is, when needs are not met consistently, one will evaluate one's self-worth according to other outcomes or expectations (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). In other words, a lack of need fulfillment is theorized to lead people to base their feelings of self-worth upon convincing themselves and others that they match a particular self-image rather than experiencing a more genuine and stable sense of self-worth. In addition, when one's relationship fulfills basic psychological needs, a more stable, true self emerges and one can truly value caring for one's partner and relationship without being overly focused on outcomes for oneself. On the surface, it might seem absurd to

suggest that self-image goals derive from thwarted need fulfillment. After all, taking showers regularly to maintain one's cleanliness in the eyes of others is both desirable and appropriate. However, taking showers regularly because one identifies with the value of being clean and healthy is better than taking showers regularly simply to avoid public ridicule.

Interpersonal goals can be integrated with the self-determination literature. Compassionate goals reflect a desired outcome concerned with close others' well-being, and when one is motivated by compassionate goals, one's behavior is driven by a genuine desire to support others for their own sake (Crocker, 2011). On the other hand, self-image goals are engaged in with a desire to establish or maintain a positive image. This is not necessarily a desire to build a false image but rather emerges from a desire to prove that one is a good, competent person to others or to oneself (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). This process is similar to self-determination theory's notion that satisfaction of basic psychological needs reduces self-image concerns and facilitates engaging close others attentively and compassionately (Crocker, 2011; Hodgins & Knee, 2002). In this sense, the empirical evidence on interpersonal goals may also benefit a deeper knowledge of self-determination in relationships. For example, compassionate goals have largely been linked to positive relationship outcomes such as perceived support given to roommates and friends (Crocker & Canevello, 2008), responsiveness to one's roommate (Canevello & Crocker, 2010), and relationship satisfaction over time (Hadden, Smith, Knee, & Canevello, 2012), whereas self-image goals generally show the reverse pattern. In what is sometimes discussed as a paradox, self-image goals tend to lead to more distant, less supportive relationships for oneself. That is, although those higher in self-image goals are concerned with obtaining benefits for themselves, they can create negative feedback loops in which the support they receive from others declines over time (Crocker & Canevello, 2008).

In the discussion of relationship autonomy, high autonomous and low controlled motivations are associated with lower feelings that one must prove oneself (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). In other words, autonomous individuals are less fixated on specific outcomes for themselves, and as a result they are more open and considerate than controlled individuals (Knee et al., in press). This literature suggests a specific mechanism that may explain why those with autonomous relationship motivations have higher quality relationships. Future research could determine the extent to which compassionate and self-image goals mediate the relationship between self-determination and relationship outcomes.

Returning to our example, Kermit's compassionate goals indicate that he genuinely cares about supporting Miss Piggy and is able to be aware of and acknowledge her needs, even during times when her self-image concerns limit her focus to largely how she is viewed and what she is and is not getting out of the relationship.

Communal and Exchange Orientations

The distinction between communal and exchange relationships was initially a qualitative one based on how benefits were given and received between relationship members (Clark & Mills, 1979; see Clark & Mills, 2012 for review). Exchange relationships were described as those in which a benefit is given with the expectation of receiving a comparable benefit in return, as is typically seen in business relationships and relationships with acquaintances and strangers. In contrast, communal relationships were defined as those in which benefits are given in support of a partner's welfare noncontingently, without a felt obligation to have them repaid, as is typically seen between friends, family members, and romantic partners. Although most of the variability in communal responsiveness is thought to exist between relationships rather than between individuals, individual differences in communal and exchange orientations can be captured by two independent scales (Clark & Mills, 2012). Higher scores on communal orientation predict a number of supportive relationship behaviors such as willingness to express emotion to partners, especially when the context suggests it, and giving partners more credit for success and blaming them less for failure on joint tasks. Furthermore, those higher on communal orientation report being more likely to take others' needs and feelings into account (Clark & Mills, 2012).

A self-determined orientation toward relationships leads people to behave out of reflection rather than reaction. As described earlier, a self-determined orientation likely goes along with compassion and concern for one's partner beyond extrinsic goals such as doing what is expected or what makes one look good. To the extent that communal orientation also reflects a focus on the partner's needs, it should overlap with partner-centered awareness. That said, a person can be communally oriented for a number of reasons that vary along the self-determination continuum, and more self-determined reasons may generally be more optimal. For example, going out of one's way to help one's partner can occur because one authentically wishes to benefit him or her or, alternatively, because one feels obligated and like a "bad partner" if one does not take this extra step. In the latter case, the motivation behind the behavior is introjected and controlled, executed out of concerns for one's self-regard rather than genuine concern for one's partner. Returning to our example, Miss Piggy likely counts the gifts and positive behaviors that she receives from Kermit, whereas Kermit is more focused on being a good partner and meeting her needs fully. It is not that Kermit ignores his own needs but rather that his own needs are satisfied through the process of interacting with and supporting Piggy.

Implicit Theories of Relationships

People bring beliefs and assumptions about how relationships develop and succeed with them into their romantic

relationships. These "implicit theories" of relationships consist of a belief in romantic destiny and an independent belief in relationship growth (see Knee, Patrick, & Lonsbary, 2003, for review). Destiny belief involves believing that relationships are either meant to be or they are not, and concerns the stability of one's impressions about relationships. When people believe strongly in romantic destiny, they assume that their impression of the match between partners is relatively accurate and that they can forecast the future of the relationship. Growth belief involves believing that relationships can be maintained and problems can be overcome, and concerns the assumption that problems in the relationship are dynamic and changing instead of stable. When people believe strongly in relationship growth, they assume that problems and disagreements are unstable and can be managed as they occur and fluctuate over the course of the relationship.

These beliefs operate as fundamental assumptions about the nature of romantic relationships, and as such, they guide inferences and attributions about relationship experiences. For example, people who believe in romantic destiny (relative to those who do not) tend to be especially sensitive to initial impressions of the relationship and tend to make stronger inferences from cues that might suggest that the relationship is not "meant to be." Specifically, relationship survival is more strongly linked to initial feelings of satisfaction and closeness among those who believe strongly in romantic destiny (Knee, 1998). Furthermore, people who strongly endorse a destiny belief tend to cope with negative relationship events by denying them, disengaging from the relationship, and refraining from maintenance attempts.

Destiny and growth beliefs are independent and can be understood as orientations when they are combined (Knee et al., 2003). For example, people with the combination of a higher growth belief and a lower destiny belief (cultivation orientation) believe that relationships evolve through efforts to maintain and improve the relationship, and are less focused on evaluating the potential outcome of relationships. When cultivating, people are focused on the process of relating, without evaluating or inferring grand meaning from otherwise minor incompatibilities. Those with the combination of a higher destiny belief and a lower growth belief (evaluation orientation) believe that relationships can be easily evaluated but that they cannot be considerably improved. When evaluating, people are focused on the potential outcome of the relationship in an effort to determine whether the relationship is a good one or not, without attempts to improve it.

The motivation behind a cultivation orientation is likely to be largely self-determined in that it is intrinsic, improvement-driven, and process-focused, with an emphasis on mastery and flexibility in reacting to and negotiating relationship challenges. Consistent with a self-determination theory perspective, a cultivation orientation reflects an autonomously invested approach to how relationships develop in that it focuses on the process of developing intimacy and closeness rather than evaluating whether the relationship meets some

standard or predetermined outcome. In a similar manner, the motivation behind an evaluation orientation is likely to be largely extrinsic, outcome driven, and outcome-focused, with an emphasis on identifying potentially good partners and relationships rather than developing them. An evaluation orientation thus reflects a less self-determined, less autonomously invested approach to how relationships emerge in that it focuses on evaluating the potential or existing value of the partner and relationship, emphasizing these outcomes rather than learning, understanding, and developing the relationship dynamics.

The self-determined motivation accompanying a cultivation orientation should carry over to acknowledgment of challenges to the relationship and attempts to deal with them openly and directly, rather than denying that they exist or giving up and abandoning the relationship altogether (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). Perceived challenges and limitations of one's partner or relationship would be especially threatening to those with an evaluation orientation because they are focused on the outcome rather than the process, and believe that undesired qualities of the relationship will not likely change.

Kermit's more self-determined motivation suggests that he would have a cultivation orientation, which explains why he is relatively open and accepting of Piggy's occasional tantrums. He views those events as opportunities to understand Piggy's motivations and needs more fully, and as chances for them to grow together and develop a stronger relationship foundation.

Gottman's Four Horsemen

Gottman and his colleagues have spent decades understanding why satisfaction for some couples remains consistent over time, whereas it declines and results in divorce for others. Findings in this area reliably report two main effects: (a) unhappily married couples engage in long chains of reciprocated negativity (i.e., where spouses exchange negative affect or behavior in response to their partner's negativity) and (b) the interactions of happily married couples display a climate of agreement, including higher levels of positivity and approval, and lower levels of disagreement and criticism during conflict (Madhyastha, Hamaker, & Gottman, 2011). The balance theory of marriage (Gottman, 1993) suggests that stable marriages have positive-to-negative behavior ratios of five to one. In fact, positive affect during marital conflict predicted marital stability and satisfaction 6 years later (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998).

Gottman and his colleagues (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992) have identified four processes that undermine relationship satisfaction that they termed "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse": criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. The presence of each of the four horsemen reliably predicts subsequent divorce. Using

multiple variations of verbal and nonverbal coding systems to examine negative affect in marital interactions, Gottman's research has demonstrated that although conflict engagement of a specific kind (e.g., anger) may be functional for a marriage over time, conflict indicative of defensiveness, stubbornness, and withdrawal predicts instability (i.e., divorce) and lower marital adjustment over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

Wile (1993) suggested that conflict may reflect a collaborative mode (characterized by self-disclosure and positive affect), an attack-defend mode (characterized by anger, blaming, criticism, and subsequent defensiveness), or an avoiding-withdrawal mode (characterized by avoiding conflict in various ways such as stonewalling). There are clear parallels between responses to conflict (as indicated by Wile and Gottman) and the motivated behaviors described by self-determination theory. Self-determination theory posits conditions for open, truthful, nondefensive communication and social interaction. The collaborative mode and positive affect indicated by a higher positive-to-negative behavior ratio may be mapped onto the more understanding and less defensive conflict responses evidenced by those who are higher in trait and relationship autonomy (Knee et al., 2002; Knee et al., 2005).

Hodgins and Knee's (2002) model of self-determined conscious experience suggests that the ability to experience events without defending against them is, in part, a function of motivational processes. The three motivation orientations determine whether individuals will approach experience nondefensively (e.g., with relatively little distortion) or defensively (e.g., as if to avoid the conflict experience). According to the model, autonomy allows for nondefensiveness toward internal events (e.g., cognitions, emotions, perceptions) and external events (e.g., feedback from a partner, interpersonal information). People with autonomous motivations do not need to protect themselves in the wake of potential threat but rather can face ongoing experiences as they are. Those with controlled orientations, however, approach experiences conditionally, primarily according to the implications for their self-worth.

Empirical data are consistent with this model. For example, diary records of social interaction over 10 to 14 days have shown that autonomous orientation predicted interpersonal honesty, openness, disclosure, and trust. These communication patterns were based on different interpersonal stances, with controlled orientation predicting a defensive stance, and autonomy orientation predicting an interpersonally open stance (Hodgins, Liebeskind, et al., 1996). Among couples, autonomous orientation was associated with the use of relationship-maintenance coping strategies, whereas controlled orientation was associated with the use of denial (Knee et al., 2002).

Furthermore, correlational and experimental research have shown that autonomous orientations are associated with lower defensiveness, fewer avoidant coping strategies, and

enhanced performance on subsequent tasks (Hodgins, Yacko, & Gottlieb, 2006; Knee & Zuckerman, 1996, 1998; Neighbors, Vietor, & Knee, 2002). Individuals high in controlled orientation are sensitive to external demands and pressures in organizing their behavior, and this sensitivity becomes particularly important in the context of intimate relationships when a partner may have requests or concerns and when implications for the self-concept are particularly strong. When such a request is made, people who are controlled are more likely to respond defensively, giving examples where they did nothing wrong or where the other partner has wronged them.

Finally, self-determination theory and Gottman's model emphasize the dynamic, dyadic nature of these interpersonal processes. The climate of agreement in Gottman's model represents what self-determination theory refers to as mutuality of autonomy support in which both giving of autonomy support as well as receiving autonomy support facilitate relationship quality (Deci et al., 2006). Furthermore, mutuality of autonomy support facilitates autonomous motivation for being in the relationship, which is strongly associated with relationship quality (Blais et al., 1990). Negative interactions can be driven reciprocally by the actor and the partner such that one partner's defensive orientation facilitates the other partner's defensive perspective and so forth. Furthermore, feeling supported by one's partner in terms of autonomy, competence, and relatedness facilitates a more open and unthreatened stance and likely reduces the "four horsemen" responses of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling. To sum up, self-determination theory integrates well with Gottman's findings and affords a framework for better understanding the circumstances under which optimal open, authentic, intimate interactions are most likely to emerge.

Although self-determination theory suggests a number of factors that reduce Gottman's four horsemen, these associations have not been directly examined. As mentioned, an autonomous orientation may defuse partners' critical responding and thus create a more stable, open, honest dialog. Furthermore, self-determination theory suggests that the degree to which one's needs are supported plays an important role in how conflict is experienced as well as the behavioral response patterns and potential for dissolution.

Positive Illusions and Self-Serving Biases

Not all research has supported the benefits of an authentic, truthful, non-ego-driven orientation toward one's romantic relationship. Murray and her colleagues (S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996, 2003) defined "illusions" as those qualities that people see in their partner that their partner does not see in himself or herself. Their research program has found that people generally project their image of an ideal partner onto their current partner and are happier in relationships in which they view their partner more generously than the partner views himself or herself. Furthermore,

this tendency goes both ways such that those who are idealized also report being happier in their relationship. Even more interestingly, over the long term, positive illusions tend to have a self-fulfilling effect, such that idealization predicts relatively greater satisfaction and less conflict over time. Over a year, partners came to see virtues in themselves that their partner had initially seen as well, as if they came to believe the inflated perceptions their partner had of them. This pattern was found to occur in marriages as well as dating relationships.

Interestingly, self-determination theory provides another perspective on the positive illusions and idealization literature. Suppose that individuals generally have a set of critical introjected beliefs and perceptions about themselves that lead them to rate themselves more negatively than they actually are. These introjected evaluations are not necessarily shared by the partner. This could lead the individual, who does not actually have illusions about the partner but merely sees him or her more positively than the partner sees himself or herself, to be more autonomy supportive of the partner, which would then facilitate the partner coming to see himself or herself in the more veridical, positive light that the partner had not initially seen.¹

As described earlier, self-determined functioning is associated with a more open, flexible, authentic perspective on events in which the person is open to what is occurring with less avoidance or distortion (Hodgins & Knee, 2002). One implication of this for intimate relationships is that autonomously oriented individuals have less need for the positive, idealized illusions that have been proposed to be important for well-being and adjustment in romantic relationships (see S. L. Murray et al., 2003, for review). Preserving illusions forfeits the opportunity to know and love another person in all of his or her glorious imperfection. Consistent with this view, Knee and Zuckerman (1996) examined autonomy and controlled orientations as moderators of the self-serving bias, a defensive attributional tendency in which people take more responsibility for success than failure. It was hypothesized that self-determined individuals (i.e., those high in autonomy and low in controlled orientation) would display fewer self-serving tendencies. Participants were randomly assigned to either succeed or fail on a task, and their attributions were measured. Self-serving biases were evident except self-determined individuals, who made fewer self-enhancing attributions for success and fewer defensive attributions for failure. Thus, attributions of self-determined individuals did not vary according to the favorability of the performance feedback they received. Rather, they attributed their performance similarly regardless of feedback.

Self-determination is also associated with using fewer defensive coping strategies. In a one-semester longitudinal study, Knee and Zuckerman (1998) examined undergraduates' use of avoidant coping, including psychological and behavioral disengagement and denial. Self-determination (high autonomy and low controlled orientation) was

associated with less use of avoidant coping over a stressful semester, as well as less self-handicapping, which is the tendency to erect impediments to one's own success to provide an excuse for failure. There is also experimental evidence that self-determination reduces self-enhancement strategies. For example, Hodgins et al. (2006) experimentally primed autonomy orientation in three studies and found that autonomy primed participants reported lower desire for escape, less self-serving bias, and less self-handicapping.

With regard to defensive emotions, other research has linked self-determination to less anger in otherwise anger-provoking situations. Specifically, Knee, Neighbors, and Vietor (2001) examined driving anger and aggressive driving behaviors as a function of autonomy and control orientations. Results showed that (a) controlled orientation was associated with more anger as a result of other drivers' actions, (b) controlled orientation was associated with more aggressive driving and more traffic citations, (c) the relation between controlled orientation and aggressive driving was mediated by driving anger, and (d) self-esteem and social anxiety did not account for the results of motivational orientations. This model was replicated and extended with an emphasis on the mediating role of ego-defensiveness between controlled orientation and driving anger (Neighbors, Vietor, & Knee, 2002). Thus, a less self-determined, more controlled orientation was linked to ego-defensiveness, experiencing more reactive emotion, which in turn was linked to reactive behavior.

Autonomous and controlled orientations have also been studied with regard to romantic relationships. For example, research has examined the tendency to expect potential partners to be like oneself. Most people tend to see some of themselves in their ideal romantic partner, and some researchers have referred to this tendency as the projection of one's own attributes onto one's ideals (S. L. Murray et al., 1996). Although this general phenomenon may be typical, research has found that this tendency is stronger among people who are higher in controlled orientation, and weaker when people are higher in autonomy orientation (Knee, Nanayakkara, et al., 2001). This work also revealed that a self-determined orientation was associated with more active and integrative coping strategies, fewer denial and avoidance strategies, and lower negative emotions, along with more positive interaction behaviors when discussing discrepant views of the relationship (Knee, Nanayakkara, et al., 2001). In short, being self-determined in relationships may make an individual not rely on positive illusions to accept and support his or her partner.

Returning to our example, whereas Piggy views Kermit through rose-colored glasses to feel that Kermit matches her or society's notion of the ideal partner, Kermit does not need positive illusions to feel good about his relationship with Piggy. His relatively self-determined motivation allows him to accept her for who she is, "warts and all," and value the way they relate, feeling comfort and appreciation at the thought of knowing and accepting the real Miss Piggy.

Risk Regulation Model

The risk regulation model describes how people attempt to balance the desire to be close to partners with the inherent risk that is associated with being close to another (S. L. Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Part of what makes relationships satisfying is becoming close to another and sharing oneself with one's partner. However, there are risks associated with becoming close to another. Feelings of rejection in romantic relationships are especially painful, and there is a risk that one's partner will decide to end the relationship. The model states that perceptions of a partner's regard guide a cognitive, affective, and behavioral system for resolving this goal conflict.

The risk regulation model emphasizes the way partners negotiate situations of dependence, in which the partner's responsiveness to one's needs is of concern, activating the threat of rejection in romantic life. When the partner's general regard for oneself is questionable and rejection seems possible, the model posits that people should tread cautiously, reserve judgment, and limit future dependence on the partner. In contrast, when confident of a partner's general regard, people can more safely risk increased dependence in the future. They can enter into situations in which the partner has control over their immediate outcomes, forgive transgressions, attach greater value to their partner's qualities, and risk a stronger sense of commitment to the partner and relationship.

The risk regulation model emphasizes the situational and individual dynamics of partners' tendencies to perceive dependent situations as risky and threatening and as having greater potential for rejection and hurt. These dynamics are thought to drive partners' motivation to either self-protect and withdraw from the relationship, or relationship-promote and invest further in the relationship.

Self-determination theory augments the proposed dynamics of the risk regulation model in that it specifies a particular set of ingredients that determine whether one views a partner's lack of commitment as safe and nonthreatening versus risky and harmful. Specifically, when people feel autonomously supported, competent, and genuinely understood, valued, and cared for in the relationship, they become less defensive, avoidant, and fearful, and more open, authentic, and understanding of potential disagreements and differences. Alternatively, if people are high in relationship-contingent self-esteem, relatively small, possibly inadvertent indications of relationship dissatisfaction by their partner can be interpreted as serious indicators of future rejection. Like the risk regulation model, self-determination theory emphasizes the interactive dynamic between the individual and the situational context but in terms of the degree to which basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported versus thwarted. When needs are supported, the assessment moves away from perceptions of threat, risk, and avoidance of rejection and moves toward

perceptions of security, nondefensive appraisals, and growth and investment in the relationship.

In this way, self-determined motivation for one's relationship would likely raise the threshold of threat at which risk regulation occurs. Evidence of this process has already been found with regard to generally stressful experiences. For example, Hodgins and her colleagues (2010) experimentally primed autonomous motivation and then videotaped and physiologically monitored participants during a stressful interview and speech. Autonomous motivation (relative to controlled motivation) decreased threat response as measured by verbal, paralinguistic, and smiling behaviors, as well as cardiovascular response. Furthermore, speech performance was mediated by degree of threat response. The risk regulation model centers on the idea that reactivity and self-protection are caused by feelings of current and potential rejection. When individuals feel rejected, they take behavioral steps to mitigate future pain. However, if an action is perceived to be less indicative of rejection and threat, there is less need for one to adjust behaviorally.

For example, if Kermit is stressed by work demands and rejects Piggy's request for a date, she may attribute that action to him pulling away from her and becoming less interested in the relationship. Alternatively, as Kermit's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met, then his orientation toward and attribution of an identical event would lean less toward self-threat and more toward understanding the situation. He would reflect on the situation instead of reacting to an ego-involved perception of threat. When self-determined, individuals are less likely to withdraw and self-protect, and more likely to engage, reflect, and attempt to understand the event (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; Knee et al., 2005). Self-determined functioning should be associated with less likelihood of sacrificing the goal of being close to one's partner simply because there is a risk of future hurt. Future research could examine whether having psychological needs fulfilled and being more autonomously motivated in one's relationship buffers people's responses to a partner's rejection behaviors.

Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy

The interpersonal process model of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) attempts to explain the development of intimacy as the result of interactional processes. This model includes components that capture the temporal nature of intimacy and the specific dyadic ingredients that either facilitate or inhibit intimacy between partners. In short, the interpersonal process model proposes that intimacy develops as the result of two primary mechanisms: self-disclosure to one's partner and responsiveness from one's partner (Reis & Shaver, 1988). According to this model, the intimacy process is initiated when one engages in self-disclosure—the act of revealing personally relevant information—with one's partner. In turn, the degree to which one's partner is responsive

to self-disclosure will result in stronger or weaker feelings of intimacy (Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004).

The interpersonal process model has received empirical support. For example, research has found that self-reports of self-disclosure and partner responsiveness are associated with levels of intimacy (Reis & Patrick, 1996). Other evidence comes from a series of studies that examined the association between interaction-specific disclosure, responsiveness, and perceived intimacy with one's partner. These studies repeatedly found that, at an interaction level, self- and partner-disclosure predicted feelings of intimacy and that responsiveness at least partially mediated these associations. Importantly, the interpersonal process model of intimacy has been studied in undergraduate samples (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998), cohabitating couples (Lippert & Prager, 2001), and married couples (Laurenceau, Feldman Barrett, & Rovine, 2005). Across all of these samples, intimacy following an interaction was found to be uniquely associated with disclosure of one's emotions and personal information, as well as feeling understood by one's partner.

This process can be further clarified using the self-determination theory framework. Specifically, we expect that the mechanism described by the interpersonal process model of intimacy is fundamentally a process through which one feels that one's needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are being met by one's partner. For example, research has found that emotional disclosure is more important than factual disclosure (Morton, 1978; Reis & Patrick, 1996), presumably because emotional disclosure allows "for the most core aspects of the self to be known, understood, and validated by another" (Laurenceau et al., 2004, p. 63). This process closely resembles the fulfillment of autonomy as one feels able to express one's "core self" and in turn feels more competent through the validation and more related by feeling understood by one's partner.

Our proposed framework continues to utilize the two-component model proposed by the interpersonal process model of intimacy. That is, feelings of need fulfillment arise from self-disclosure and responsiveness of one's partner, and both are critical to developing intimacy. The act of self-disclosing increases intimacy because it results in greater need fulfillment. Specifically, the act of revealing personally relevant information increases feelings of autonomy as one is able express oneself freely and openly. As suggested by Uysal, Lin, and Knee (2010), not disclosing personally relevant information results in lower autonomy because of constant monitoring of what one says, and prevents the authentic revealing of one's true self that is inherent in feeling autonomous. In addition, one might feel less related due to self-perception processes, specifically noticing that one does not disclose personal information about oneself. Indeed, across two studies, Uysal, Lin, Knee, and Bush (2012) found that self-concealment in romantic relationships, defined as

actively hiding negative personally relevant information from one's partner, predicted lower well-being because of lower need fulfillment at between- and within-person levels.

Need fulfillment might also explain the second part of the process. That is, responsiveness may be important as it provides the sense that one's partner fulfills one's basic psychological needs. Specifically, we propose that responsiveness from partners following self-disclosure will increase intimacy to the extent that the response supports basic psychological needs. As conceptualized by several researchers (e.g., Laurenceau et al., 2004; Reis & Patrick, 1996), this notion is somewhat implicit in the definition of responsiveness. For example, Laurenceau and colleagues (2004) defined responsiveness as communication of "understanding, validation, and caring . . ." (p. 64). In essence, self-disclosure allows one to receive autonomy support as partners express understanding of one's values, feelings, and desires. Furthermore, at this stage in the process, one's partner can provide competence support in the form of validation of certain qualities. Finally, responsiveness includes a component of caring, which reflects the need for relatedness and connection.

Thus, although the interpersonal process model of intimacy has been very useful in organizing research on intimacy and providing an explanatory framework for the development of intimacy, self-determination theory can further illuminate and clarify the mechanisms underlying this process, as it makes the components more explicit. That is, self-determination theory provides more overt rationale for why self-disclosure increases intimacy. Specifically, under the SDT framework, self-disclosure itself provides a sense of need fulfillment. Furthermore, the responsiveness provided by one's partner is crucial for the development of intimacy specifically when—or because—the response provides support of basic psychological needs.

Conclusion

Self-determination theory provides an integrative perspective that elaborates and defines optimal development and true self-investment in one's close relationships. The continuum of self-determined motivation, which varies from non-self-determined to fully self-determined investment, is not explicitly articulated in theories of close relationships, and yet, it affords a perspective with which to understand optimal fulfillment of basic psychological needs in close relationships. According to self-determination theory, relationships that facilitate both partners' feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and those in which partners are engaged for relatively more integrated and intrinsic reasons, will be more likely to yield open, authentic, nondefensive behaviors and stances, especially during otherwise ego-threatening conflicts and other relationship events. From the perspective of self-determination theory, investing one's true self in one's relationship means engaging

one's true self and that of one's partner in the most genuine sense in a way that promotes openness rather than defensiveness and facilitates perspective-taking and support of close others. The dyadic context of romantic relationships affords an opportunity for integrating sophisticated models of motivation with theories of interdependence and relational well-being.

Relationship science has put forth numerous concepts, models, and theories that predict relationship functioning and quality. As we have shown, their specifics and, more importantly, their commonalities can frequently be explained through the lens of self-determination theory. Most close relationship theories are limited to discussions of what self-determination theory refers to as relatedness. However, self-determination theory also posits the importance of competence and autonomy support for a fully functioning relationship. Furthermore, self-determination theory often goes beyond other theories by describing the mechanics of true self-development in the interpersonal context, suggesting for whom, how, and in what situations mutual need support is most likely. Finally, the integration of self-determination theory with other close relationship theories facilitates our understanding of the dynamics of human need fulfillment within an interpersonal context that, in practice, occurs to varying degrees of success. Thus, self-determination theory not only provides an account of how successful, mutually fulfilling close relationships can emerge but also the ways in which they often get undermined, thwarted, and decay as well.

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