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A Developmental Guide to the Organisation of Close Relationships

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A developmental guide to close relationships is presented. Parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic relationships are described along dimensions that address permanence, power, and gender. These dimensions describe relationship differences in organisational principles that encompass internal representations, social understanding, and interpersonal experiences. The concept of domain specificity is borrowed from cognitive development to address the shifting developmental dynamics of close relationships. Distinct relationships are organised around distinct socialisation tasks, so each relationship requires its own organisational system. As a consequence, different principles guide different relationships, and these organisational principles change with development.

Across the lifespan, close relationships provide a significant context for development and adaptation. It is clear that competence is a product of interpersonal interactions, but the influence of family, friends, and romantic partners on individual outcomes extends beyond success or failure in the social world. Close relationships are the primary setting for the acquisition of language and motor skills, the establishment and maintenance of mental health and self-efficacy, and the expansion and augmentation of cognitive abilities (Hartup & Laursen, 1991). The effects run deep as well as wide: Close relationships are one of the fundamental building blocks of human culture, transmitting lessons on survival and adaptation from one generation

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to the next (Brewer, in press). Development is bound to experience in close relationships.

Relationships differ in their specific contributions to individual development. Family and peer relationships proffer unique and complementary social experiences (Hartup, 1979). Parents promote individuality by providing a secure base from which to explore the social world, yet it is experience with age-mates that prompts the development of autonomy. Differences in form contribute to relationship differences in functioning (Collins & Repinski, 1994). Peer relationships are temporary; friends and romantic partners devote a great deal of time to the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal ties. Family relationships are durable; participants tend not to dwell on the details of relationship processes. Social competence builds on success in both interpersonal arenas; each is a critical developmental context.

Developmental tasks change with age and maturity, and so do the contributions of parents and peers to adaptation. Early childhood tends to be dominated by parent-child relationships but the importance of peer relationships increases such that the influence of friends and romantic partners is equal to or greater than that of family members by late adolescence (Furman, 1989). These changes coincide with a rapid expansion of the nonfamilial social world; across childhood and adolescence, family members represent a diminishing proportion of social experiences (Larson & Richards, 1991). Developmental changes are linked to changes in manifestations of close relationships; one rarely proceeds without the other.

What accounts for developmental shifts in close relationships? Participants tend to construct relationships consistent with their psychological goals, cognitive abilities, and social demands. This suggests that relationship alterations are a product of psychological, cognitive, and social development. Some theorists emphasise changes associated with the emerging self-system; relationships reflect the psychological needs of participants, with early relationships serving as prototypes for later relationships (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Other theorists emphasise changes that accompany cognitive advances; social understanding improves as intellectual skills and perspective-taking abilities develop which, in turn, prompt a greater appreciation of relationship dynamics (Dunn, 1993; Selman, 1980; Youniss, 1980). Still other theorists emphasise changes linked to expanding social experiences and social opportunities; greater individual control over interpersonal relationships increases concerns over the quality and distribution of social exchanges (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Laursen, 1996). In sum, close relationship processes are driven by the developmental agendas of participants.

Relationships change as environments change. Different environments present different challenges to individuals. For example, the maintenance of

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friendships may be less difficult in the well-structured environments of elementary school than in the expansive environment of secondary schools (Hirsch & Dubois, 1989). In so far as different environments present different challenges, relationship functions should vary along with the principles that guide them. By the same token, different environments present different relationship opportunities. Certainly, the peer-intense environment of child care offers more opportunities for friendship than the home-based care environment (Clarke-Stewart, 1984). It follows that links between development, relationships, and context are multidirectional. Relationships change as a function of development and relationships provide developmental contexts. Within relationships, norms, goals, and standards are established. These concepts shape the subsequent force and direction of the relationship and of the individuals who comprise it.

This paper is based on three suppositions. First, different principles guide the organisation of different relationships. Second, organisational principles change with development. Third, the organisational principles that guide close relationships vary across individuals and relationships. Four sections follow. First, close relationships are defined and described. Discrete dimensions are introduced that distinguish among different types of relationships: permanence (i.e. voluntary and obligatory relationships); power (i.e. hierarchical and egalitarian relationships); and gender (i.e. same-sex and cross-sex relationships). Second, specific close relationships are discussed in terms of these dimensions. Parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic relationships may be identified by their unique attributes. Third, principles that prompt relationship change and that organise behaviour within relationships are reviewed. No single developmental perspective best accounts for alterations in close relationships across the lifespan. Instead, interpersonal behaviour appears to be guided by domain specificity: Distinct relationship rules apply to different relationships, and the principles that organise each relationship change with development. Fourth, family and peer relationship processes are considered to determine how the formation and maintenance of a relationship contributes to individual development. The discussion concludes with a research agenda and a developmental guide addressing principles that organise close relationships during infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

IDENTIFYING AND CLASSIFYING CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

"The first stage in the scientific study of interpersonal relationships should be one of description and classification" (Hinde, 1976, p. 1). Adhering to this injunction, we describe relationships in terms of interdependent interaction sequences. Quantitative and qualitative variations in social interactions

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signal relationship differences. Close relationships are marked by extensive and influential interconnections; many affiliations qualify as relationships but few are close. Social interactions also reveal fundamental differences among close relationships, differences that lend themselves to classification along several distinct relationship dimensions.

How to Recognise a Close Relationship

Relationships are essentially dyadic entities. That is, a relationship requires and is limited to two participants (Berscheid & Reis, in press). These dyads are embedded in a larger social network made up of a shifting constellation of individuals and groups. Dyadic interchange—intermittent social interaction over an extended period of time—is one of the defining features of a relationship (Hinde, 1979). A single interaction, however, doth not a relationship make: Repeated interchanges are required. Yet even an extended series of interactions does not necessarily herald a relationship, particularly if participants are cast in routinised roles (Hinde, in press). One may not develop a relationship with a restaurant employee despite frequent exchanges involving money and tacos. By the same token, a relationship may persist in the absence of social interaction. Family members do not act like strangers during reunions, even after a prolonged separation. Thus, the presence of social interaction is an important clue to identifying a relationship but it cannot serve as the sole criterion for defining one. For interactions to serve as the basis of a relationship they must be assigned a meaning (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1985). That is, participants need to interpret and internalise interchanges to form a representation or understanding of the relationship.

Properties of social interaction set relationships apart from casual affiliations. Interdependent, enduring, and reciprocal interactions are assumed to be necessary components of all relationships (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996). Interdependence reflects causal dyadic influences, a state in which changes in one partner effect changes in the other (Kelley et al., 1983). Social interactions form the basis of interdependence, for it is through interactions that individuals exert influence. Enduring interconnections are internalised by participants as cognitive representations. Typically, social interactions are organised into mental schema consisting of memories and affects, which shape expectations concerning future interactions (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991). Participants in a relationship engage in mutually influential interchanges and share the perception that their interconnections are interdependent and enduring (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1995). Simply put, relationships require a modicum of reciprocity in social interactions and cognitive representations.

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History suggests that close relationships are difficult to define. "The words used to explain the phrase *close relationship* often carry clouds of ambiguity, and so people are not infrequently driven to concrete single-case illustrations or to highly abstract analogies and metaphors to try to communicate what they mean by the term, often with little success" (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983, p. 12). In response to this problem, scholars have taken to defining closeness in the objective language of social interaction. A widely accepted definition describes close relationships in terms of dyadic interactions that reflect a high degree of interdependence, manifest in frequent, strong, and diverse interconnections maintained over an extended period of time (Kelley et al., 1983). Consistent with an emphasis on objectivity, indices of interdependence are usually limited to readily measured and observable relationship features (Clark & Reis, 1988). Subjective participant states may be an important aspect of relationship satisfaction, but they are not good markers of closeness: Happy partners are not necessarily involved in the most interdependent relationships and vice versa.

Extensive relationships networks are common. These networks typically include kin and neighbours, peers, and work associates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Developmental research has yet to identify systematically changes in the size or composition of these networks across the lifespan, nor has the exact proportion of relationships that qualify as close during each developmental period been made clear. In a North American study of middle childhood, social networks that encompassed all relationships included an average of 39 different participants (Feiring & Lewis, 1989). In a comparable study of adolescence, social networks limited to important relationships included an average of 15 different participants (Blyth, Hill, & Thiel, 1982). Taken together, these studies suggest that something less than half of all relationships during childhood and adolescence qualify as close. This limited set usually consists of some combination of parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic relationships (Argyle & Furnham, 1983; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992). The size and diversity of the total relationship network appear to have little impact on the composition of the close relationship network.

How do you recognise a close relationship? Objective assessments of social interaction are the best indices of closeness, providing greater validity and reliability than subjective reports of affective experience (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989). Measured in these terms, a close relationship displays interdependent interconnections in the form of frequent, diverse, and enduring interactions. A degree of differential responsiveness must be evident, such that the actions of one participant are contingent upon those of the other. Any relationship may qualify as close, although the term is usually reserved for kin and companions.

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How to Distinguish Among Different Types of Close Relationships

Relationship taxonomies abound and multiple dimensions have been used to characterise relationships. Not all relationships differ along the same set of underlying dimensions. Accordingly, the challenge to the development of a model of relationships is to identify structural dimensions that avoid constructs specific to a single relationship or developmental period. Differences between relationships may be qualitative as well as quantitative, so some dimensions may be more relevant than others. Contextual diversity poses another challenge; relationship manifestations may vary across and within settings. In this section, we describe classification schemes that avoid these difficulties, grouping them into three global relationship dimensions: (1) permanence; (2) power; and (3) gender. Each offers a universal metric for comparing relationships that is independent of variation ascribed to setting or ontogeny.

The first relationship dimension, permanence, describes the degree to which a relationship is stable. Permanence encompasses several related constructs: voluntariness, kinship, and commitment. Individuals freely enter into voluntary relationships; open field exchanges continue so long as participants perceive them to be beneficial (Murstein, 1970). Obligatory relationships, in contrast, are difficult or impossible to dissolve, closed field exchanges continue regardless of perceived inequities. Relationships involving kin are governed by rules that are unrelated to interdependence, and that may supersede it (Blumstein & Kollock, 1988). Relationships involving nonkin, in contrast, tend to be built around interdependent interconnections. Commitment describes one's desire or intent to continue in a relationship (Rusbult, 1980). Participants in committed relationships tend to focus on maximising dyadic outcomes, whereas the uncommitted tend to focus on maximising self benefits.

Interactions in stable relationships differ from those that are potentially unstable. Principles of social exchange are more apt to govern tenuous relationships than those in which continuity is assured (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). In permanent relationships, participants need not worry about the ramifications of each social interaction. It follows that equitable outcomes are not a priority in obligatory, kin, and committed relationships because the ties that bind participants together are unrelated to interaction outcomes. In impermanent relationships, the threat of relationship dissolution alters the dynamics of social interaction. Equitable outcomes are particularly important in voluntary, nonkin, and uncommitted relationships because individuals tend to participate only so long as interactions remain mutually advantageous.

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The second relationship dimension, power, describes the degree to which dominance shapes the relationship. Power structures may be hierarchical or egalitarian, vertical or horizontal, authoritative or mutual. Hierarchical relationship interconnections are prescribed by rank; customs dictate whether interchanges between the unequal favour the socially advantaged or disadvantaged (Fiske, 1992). Egalitarian relationships differ in that communality is prescribed; interconnections must reflect equality and respect for one another's needs (Clark & Mills, 1979). Vertical relationship interconnections build on acknowledged complementarities; the less capable depend on the more able (Hartup & Laursen, 1991). Horizontal relationships differ in that reciprocity guides participants; equivalent contributions from each partner are assumed. Authoritative relationships assume discrepancies in the relative influence of participants; the strong tend to dominate the weak (Youniss, 1980). Mutual relationships differ in that they are premised on collaboration; partners co-construct rules and responsibilities.

Social interaction in relationships with a power differential are fundamentally different from those involving participants with similar power (Piaget, 1932/1965). Unequal power leads to unidirectional interactions; most exchanges consist of one partner doing something for or requesting something of the other. Collaboration is difficult, if not impossible, because participants cannot behave as equals. Equivalent power prompts bidirectional interactions. Both participants share the responsibility for outcomes because neither can unilaterally dictate the terms of interdependence. Horizontal, vertical, and authoritative relationships are predicated on a lack of equivalence. Participants expect unequal outcomes from interactions and attribute them to the power differential. In contrast, participants in egalitarian, horizontal, and mutual relationships share power and expect equitable interactions. Similarity, it seems, breeds concent.

The third relationship dimension, gender, describes the degree to which the organisation of a relationship reflects sexual dimorphism. Three distinctions fall under this rubric: differences based on participant sex, differences based on gender roles, and differences based on sexual attraction. The sexual composition of a dyad establishes the parameters of a relationship (Maccoby, 1990). Men demand similar interconnections in same-sex and cross-sex relationships, forcing women to modify interconnections that prevail in female-female relationships to conform to men's preferences in male-female relationships. Participant gender roles define a relationship as masculine, feminine, or traditional (Hendrick, 1988). Masculine relationships tend to be hierarchical and inclusive, feminine relationships are often communal and exclusive, and traditional

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relationships may adhere to sex-segregated stereotypes. Sexuality lends a final dimension to relationships (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, in press). Sexual attraction between participants affords a set of interconnections that are unavailable to other dyads.

Gender exercises a pervasive influence over social interaction (Berscheid, 1994). Relationships between men and relationships characterised by masculine gender roles tend to emphasise participation in activities, many of which require the establishment of a dominance hierarchy. Relationships between women and relationships involving feminine gender roles tend to emphasise mutual need satisfaction, which entails the expression of intimacy and affection. Relationships between men and women and relationships characterised by traditional gender roles are unique in that interactions may be masculine in style but feminine in content. Sexuality adds yet another dimension to dyadic behaviour. Social interaction patterns attributed to gender roles and sexual composition may be augmented by sexual attraction. Interactions between those who are sexually attracted to one another are the product of a unique set of behavioural contingencies that may be traced to societal expectations and evolved mechanisms designed to encourage procreation and pair bonding.

How do you distinguish among different types of close relationships? Taxonomies that confound a specific relationship with a typological distinction create unhelpful tautologies (Berscheid & Reis, in press). The three descriptive dimensions previously identified circumnavigate this problem; each applies to all relationships and is unique to none. Permanence describes the extent to which social interactions are premised on stability. Power describes whether social interactions are a manifestation of dominance. Gender describes how social interactions are shaped by sex-based attributes. In the section that follows, these dimensions are applied to different close relationships, delineating distinctions among relationship categories.

DISTINCTIONS AMONG FAMILY AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

"The nature, structure, dynamics, demands, and rewards of children's relationships with parents, siblings, and friends are different in important respects, and the quality of each depends on both individuals involved in the particular relationship" (Dunn, 1993, p. 115). Setting individual variation aside for the moment, we begin with an examination of group characteristics. Consistent differences among parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic partner relationships may be identified. We consider each in turn, describing interconnections within close relationships as a function of permanence, power, and gender. Taken together, the portraits reveal aspects of

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dimensions that are shared across relationships. Taken separately, each portrait reveals a unique combination of relationship attributes.

How Parent-Child Relationships are Organised

Stability and power dominate the landscape occupied by parents and offspring. Social interactions reflect the influence of each on the organisation of parent-child relationships: Interconnections between participants persist in the face of unequal, unilateral interchanges. Gender alters the specific manifestations of these features, but not the overall pattern.

Parent-child relationships are obligatory (Maccoby, in press). Kinship creates a closed-field for social interactions. Continued transactions are assured because participants are not free to leave the relationship. Social and biological imperatives require commitment to obligatory kin relationships, forcing parents and children to accept dyadic benefits in lieu of personal ones. Parent-child relationships are also hierarchical and authoritative (Barker & Wright, 1955). Their interconnections are complementary. Parents dominate interactions with children by virtue of greater power and wisdom, and children depend on the control and guidance of parents. This vertical structure rests on the paradox of inequitable exchange: Resources flow from the powerful to the weak. Children may be involved in same-sex and opposite-sex parent-child relationships, but the specific gender role patterns in these relationships differ for daughters and sons (Scanzoni, Polonko, Teachman, & Thompson, 1989). Cross-sex parent-child relationships tend to be based on traditional gender roles, especially those between fathers and daughters. Father-son relationships are invariably masculine, whereas there is more latitude in the degree to which mother-daughter relationships are feminine. Overt sexual attraction is not normative in these relationships, although sexuality may play an important role in social interactions.

How Sibling Relationships are Organised

Stability is inherent in sibling relationships but dominance varies according to the age and gender of participants. Same-sex siblings who are similar in age are more apt to treat one another as equals than cross-sex siblings who are substantially different in age. Social interactions reflect the permanent, quasi-symmetrical nature of the sibling relationship: The equitable outcomes expected of interchanges between those who share power are often incongruous with the realities of a relationship based on permanent interconnections.

Relationships between siblings are obligatory (Berscheid, 1994); some participants describe them as involuntary. The relationship and the setting in which the relationship is embedded are closed-fields; kinship assures

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continued close quarters and social interaction, regardless of the consequences. Commitment is expected of siblings, but it may not be displayed in a manner consistent with the goal of maximising dyadic benefits. Sibling relationships contain vertical and horizontal properties (Dunn, 1983). Complementarity and reciprocity coexist. Measured in real terms, the power difference between most siblings is slight, and relationships contain more elements of a horizontal structure than a vertical one. An older child may assume authority over a younger child, but this usually arises during a temporary power vacuum. Once the authority figure returns, egalitarianism and mutuality are expected. Gender alters patterns of sibling interaction (Buhrmester, 1992). Daughters are more apt to be given authority over siblings than sons, yet this does not translate into a hierarchy among brothers and sisters that favours the latter; if anything, the reverse is true. Some sibling competition is tolerated, but after a certain point a communal norm consistent with feminine gender roles is apt to be enforced, especially when the rivalry involves sisters. Sexual attraction among siblings is atypical.

How Friendships are Organised

Friendships are noteworthy because they are not obligatory, therefore they are potentially impermanent. Most friendships are based on equality; dominance is not normative. Interactions are predicated on sharing power and averting instability. Faced with the potential threat of relationship dissolution, interchanges are carefully monitored to keep outcomes mutually satisfying. Friendships usually involve same-sex partners, with males and females differing in the specifics of their interconnections.

Friendships are voluntary (Palsi & Ransford, 1987) in the sense that the setting and the relationship are an open-field; interconnections owe no allegiance to kin or environment, leaving participants free to disconnect at any time. Friends initially focus on the distribution of personal benefits because they lack commitment to one another, but dyadic concerns grow as commitment to the relationship increases. Friendships are prototypic horizontal relationships (Hartup, 1979). Participants expect reciprocity, which implies a mutual system for sharing the rewards and costs of interactions. Interconnections are jointly constructed; working together, friends establish, monitor, and revise the rules of exchange. Egalitarianism is the norm, but friendship can thrive within a hierarchical structure. Friendship is an overwhelmingly same-sex phenomenon (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, in press). The better adapted may also have opposite-sex friends, but those whose friends are exclusively of the opposite-sex tend to be poorly adjusted. Males typically have more friends than females, perhaps because the masculine form of the relationship is limited to participation in common pastimes, whereas the feminine form also demands intimate expression. By

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definition, platonic friendship lacks a sexual component but, in practice, the two are difficult to disentangle when the participants are a male and a female.

How Romantic Relationships are Organised

Romantic relationships are unique in that participants may attempt to increase the stability of their impermanent interconnections. Social interactions reflect alterations in the organisation of the relationship, as individual goals give way to dyadic concerns. Gender and the distribution of power within romantic relationships are closely linked, which typically results in some form of dominance based on traditional gender roles.

Most romantic relationships begin voluntarily (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Participants approach the relationship intent on maximising personal outcomes, and open-field conditions permit them to withdraw should interactions prove dissatisfactory. Mutually beneficial exchanges promote interconnections. To ensure a stable source of benefits, participants may resort to increasingly public vows of commitment intended to transform a voluntary nonkin relationship into a nonvoluntary kin relationship. The establishment of a closed-field hinders relationship dissolution, diminishing the importance of equitable outcomes. There are vast cultural differences in romantic relationships, differences predicated on the relative power of participants. Contemporary Western romantic relationships tend to be more horizontal than vertical; most contain some elements of reciprocity and complementarity (Huston, 1983). Although partners usually hold egalitarianism as a goal, status differences make hierarchical arrangements difficult to avoid. Romantic relationships are customarily authoritative; the presence of mutual influence does not preclude differences in absolute influence. Power and sex, however, are a tangled skein (Peplau, 1983). Dominance in heterosexual romantic relationships has origins in traditional gender roles. Status and authority differences spawn hierarchical interactions. By minimising these differences, feminine and masculine relationships encourage mutual and egalitarian interactions. Interconnections based on sexual attraction may have origins in evolved complementarities; the extent to which distal mechanisms influence same-sex and opposite-sex romantic relationships is not fully understood.

How are close relationships organised? Parent-child and sibling relationships are permanent, friendships are not, and romantic relationships run the gamut of transient to indissoluble. Parents dominate children, friends behave as equals, and siblings and romantic partners distribute power in a manner that falls somewhere in between these extremes. Same-sex and cross-sex relationships are common among parents and children, and both may be present among siblings. In contrast, cross-sex

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relationships prevail among romantic partners and same-sex relationships typify friendships. Although gender roles may transcend sexual composition, relationships between men tend to be masculine, those between women tend to be feminine, and cross-sex relationships tend to reflect traditional gender roles. In most cases, the influence of sexual attraction is limited to romantic relationships.

FACTORS THAT SHAPE THE ORGANISATION OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

"The developmental capabilities and concerns of the child must have bearing on the dimensions of a relationship that are most important, on how a relationship is experienced, and on what its course will be" (Radke-Yarrow, Richters, & Wilson, 1988, p. 65). The search for organisational principles leads us to examine variation within and between relationships. Individuals and dyads differ in terms of their orientation toward specific relationship dimensions, differences that flow from the traits and ontogenetic timetables of participants. This systematic variability suggests that domain specificity offers the most parsimonious account of relationship organisation. We conclude that different relationships are structured according to different principles during different developmental periods.

How Individual Differences Influence Close Relationships

Participant characteristics help to define salient relationship attributes. Discrete populations present different schemas and relationship orientations (Berscheid, 1994). Individuals may be distinguished by perceptions of security and trust (Bowlby, 1969). The secure express confidence in the responsive care proffered by relationships, whereas the insecure fear disappointment. Individual exchange orientations also differ (Murstein, Cerreto, & MacDonald, 1977). Maintaining a strict balance of interaction rewards and costs is important to some, whereas others make little attempt to account for relationship transactions. When individual differences in organisational preferences are extended to dyads, the relationship may be described as secure or insecure, communal or exchange. Linkages between individual preferences and dyadic characteristics are intuitively obvious, but the lack of a direct correspondence between the two suggests a complicated interplay of influences (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). As a consequence, insecure individuals may have secure relationships and secure individuals may be involved in insecure relationships.

Parents and children, friends, siblings, and romantic partners tend not to place the same value on organisational attributes. Instead, the features

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prominent within each reflect the interconnections that typify the relationship (Hinde, 1979). Power may be more important than permanence in social interactions between parents and children; the reverse may be the case for friends. Yet beneath what appear to be consistent organisational rules, differences within relationships may be lurking in the extent to which participants adhere to these principles (Hartup, 1993). Interactions between friends usually reflect a concern with permanence because most individuals value balanced exchanges. Friends with a low exchange orientation, however, may place a premium on an equal distribution of power.

Development further complicates the picture in that organisational tendencies of individuals and their relationships change over time (Laursen, 1996). Young children have little appreciation for the nuances involved in maintaining outcome equality. In contrast, dominance is an attribute that they readily grasp. Thus, power rather than permanence may be the prevailing theme in early relationships. With age, comes the social experience and cognitive maturity required to understand principles of exchange. As a consequence, permanence may be of greater concern than power in the relationships of adolescents and adults. Changes in individuals are accompanied by developmental alterations in relationships (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). For example, parent-child relationships are premised initially on power differentials, but increasing autonomy brings about a need to recast interactions in terms of benefit outcomes. Finally, relationships themselves have developmental histories, and interactions are organised differently during the beginning, middle, and end of a relationship (Berscheid & Reis, in press). For example, sexual attraction waxes and wanes over the course of a romantic relationship, as does the importance of the construct to participants.

How Domain Specificity Accounts for Individual Differences

Confronted with a bewildering array of individual and dyadic influences, one might be tempted to invoke a chaos theory interpretation of the organisation of close relationships. But other attractive alternatives beckon. Domain specificity—originally applied to performance distinctions in cognitive development (Piaget, 1972)—may be adapted to fit the challenges of interpersonal behaviour (Bugental & Goodnow, in press). The domain-specific approach argues that no single socialisation principle directs relationships. Instead, interactions are guided by a varied set of socialisation rules. Different relationships are organised around distinct socialisation tasks, so each relationship requires its own unique canon (Maccoby, in press). In other words, there are no universal organisational principles, only relative ones. To suggest a domain-specific structure within close

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relationships is to imply that rules of engagement differ within the spheres circumscribed by parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic relationships.

Each of these relationships occupies a specific niche in the lives of participants; maturation and experience independently alter their interactions and functions. It follows that the rules governing these distinct spheres must inevitably change to accommodate the needs of the participants and the relationship. Beyond describing differences between relationships, domain specificity provides an account of variation within relationships. The ability to change behavioural guidelines provides participants with the flexibility to adapt the relationship to situational demands, developmental timetables, and relationship histories (Bugental & Goodnow, in press). As a consequence, parents may invoke outcome equality when it suits their needs without threatening their dominant position with children. Similarly, friends may resort to coercion now and then without threatening the equivalent distribution of power. The important point is that organisational principles are constructed within each relationship; individual differences arise as dyads adapt general relationship rules to their specific needs.

What factors shape the organisation of close relationships? Inspection reveals that relationships are more variable than static. When it comes to organisational principles, one size does not fit all. Systematic differences between relationships are augmented by individual differences predicated on participant characteristics and dyadic attributes. Although anarchy might seem the logical result, what evolves instead is a sophisticated system of rules catered to individuals and relationships. These organisational principles are understood to be specific to each relationship domain.

At this point, a traditional conceptual paper would conclude with an explicit typology of the topic at hand, but we are forced to deviate from the prescribed finale because domain specificity is incompatible with taxonomic inflexibility (Maccoby, in press). So instead we close with a discussion of issues concerning the creation of a developmental model that accounts for age-related differences in the establishment, maintenance, functions, and contributions of parent-child, sibling, friend, and romantic partner relationships across the lifespan.

CONSTRUCTING A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF RELATIONSHIPS: A RESEARCH AGENDA

Unique challenges await those constructing a developmental model of close relationships. Developmental models are often guided by the concept of a developmental goal or end-point. According to this view, the model should account for changes in an individual from a relatively immature state to a final state recognised as maturity. This approach offers clear advantages in

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that it provides a relatively unambiguous end-point for the model. Unfortunately, developmental end-points in the study of relationships tend to be ambiguous and elusive. Certainly, humans move from a state in which relationships are simple and lack organisation to a state in which relationships are complex and structured. This richness is manifest in so many different ways, however, that developmental end-points are usually cast in either elementary or abstract terms.

Relationships typically have multidimensional developmental goals. Individuals engage in different types of relationships with different participants, so a developmental model of relationships must necessarily account for experiences in multiple relationship domains. This multidimensionality is compounded by age-related variations in the types of relationships in which individuals participate and in the skills and developmental histories that each brings to the relationship. Different domains of relationship experiences are linked together, concurrently and over time. Multidimensionality presents three challenges to the construction of a developmental model of relationships. First, a developmental model must describe properties of different relationships that are constant as well as those that vary as a function of age and maturation. Second, a developmental model must be sensitive to the fact that individual abilities and needs vary with age and maturation, as do the requirements participants place on relationships. These requirements determine the types of interactions that occur between participants and define the developmental functions of the relationship. Third, a developmental model must account for patterns of influence among relationships. Experiences in one type of relationship influence experiences in others, each with mutually compensatory potential. As a consequence, one relationship may be pressed into the service of another.

Our research agenda, adapting Hinde's (1979) framework for understanding relationships, begins with a descriptive goal: The comprehensive developmental depiction of characteristics of different relationships. To this end, age-related changes in interactions must be identified in a manner that describes how partners create a relationship and how they maintain it (e.g. Collins & Russell, 1991; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, in press). In addition, age-related variations in the meanings that participants ascribe to relationships must be identified in a manner that describes conscious and unconscious constructs concerning interconnections and interactions (e.g. Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Youniss, 1980). Finally, age-related changes in the basic dimensions of relationships must be identified. Different relationship dimensions are appropriate for a developmental model of close relationships. We have suggested three that appear to be particularly salient: permanence, power, and gender. Their developmental patterns are discussed in the final section.

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A developmental model of relationships must describe changes in the significance of each relationship system. It has been argued, for example, that peer relationships gradually supplant family relationships (Sullivan, 1953), and evidence supports this assertion (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992, Laursen & Williams, in press). A developmental model must reflect the complicated interplay of person and setting, for ontogenetic variation is likely across domains. For example, although adolescents increasingly look to friends for guidance, there are specific topics over which they still turn to parents for advice (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). A developmental model must distinguish between differences in the salience of a relationship that are due to age-related variations in behaviour, and those that are a product of internal representations. For instance, at the onset of dating, heterosexual behaviour designed to enhance reproductive fitness coincide with the internalisation of a romantic attachment figure (Furman, in press). These challenges illustrate the importance of a research agenda that integrates interactions, relationship trajectories, and features that moderate their interplay.

Relationship systems are interconnected and these interconnections are sensitive to developmental variations. Evidence suggests that interactions in one domain influence those in other domains. For example, greater levels of rough and tumble play with fathers at home are associated with greater levels of popularity with peers at school (MacDonald, 1987). Evidence also suggests that experiences in one relationship may compensate for those in another. For example, positive interactions with friends buffer against the developmental difficulties of nonoptimal families (Gauze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee, & Sippola, 1996). These interconnections and their compensatory effects are the product of relationship features and the developmental demands each is supposed to meet.

To summarise, we propose a research agenda for the construction of a developmental model of relationships that emphasises three interrelated themes. (1) A description of the characteristics that define relationships, the interactions within relationships, and the meaning derived from relationships. (2) An account of changes in the developmental salience or significance of different types of relationships. (3) An assessment of relationship interconnections, concurrent and across time. In so far as relationship experiences reflect participant attributes, this research agenda cannot be considered independent of broader developmental considerations of relationship change. We close with a discussion of developmental principles that underlie relationship change and their potential impact on the organisation of the social world.

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A DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDE TO PRINCIPLES THAT ORGANISE FAMILY AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Development is an ongoing series of interactions between a changing organism and a changing environment. Individuals and environments are inextricably bound; individuals gravitate toward environmental niches as a function of needs (real or perceived) and environments are shaped by the individuals who occupy them. This interplay may involve deliberate steps by individuals who actively choose from among available social environments, or it may involve passively submitting to a prescribed environment constructed for the individual (Scarr & McCartney, 1983). To put it another way, some relationships are constructed by participants and others are constructed for participants. As the needs and skills of individuals change with development, relationships are revised accordingly. Once formed, however, all relationships must balance changes in participants with changes in the social world that encompass the relationship.

Although it is difficult to argue that there is a normal developmental trajectory, human development across cultures adheres to a basic set of continuities and discontinuities (Benedict, 1949). Essentially, individuals move from a state of being dependent, passive, and relatively asexual to a state of being responsible, assertive, and capable of sexuality. Changes in these states occur within the context of relationships and they motivate changes in relationships. Development in at least three arenas prompts relationship alterations: changes in internal representations, changes in social understanding; and changes in interdependence. Internal representations encompass conscious and unconscious psychological processes that shape the individual's view of the world and his/her place within it (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Social understanding encompasses cognitive advances that prompt an awareness of relationships and an appreciation of the unique features of participants (Dunn, 1993; Selman, 1980; Youniss, 1980). Interdependence encompasses experiences that promote social exchange and afford opportunities to explore the mechanics of interpersonal transactions (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Laursen, 1996). The form and function of relationships are guided by developmental changes in these arenas.

The parent-child relationship is initially involuntary, with the child dependent on the parent. Interactions entail the regulation and satisfaction of the child's basic needs so as to establish physical and emotional security. Once regulation is internalised, the relationship becomes less organised around dependency and caretaking (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Greater levels of social understanding on the part of the child prompt changes in relationships with parents that diminish the role of internal representations (Dunn, 1993). Vertical interactions give way to an increasingly horizontal

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power structure (Lollis, Ross, & Tate, 1992). The parent-child relationship is further transformed by the emergence of adolescent autonomy (Steinberg & Silverberg, 1986). Yet it is not the case that detachment severs parent-child attachment. Instead, autonomy introduces a new element into the parent-child relationship, namely that of interdependence. As children move through adolescence and into adulthood, social exchange grows in prominence because family exchanges are increasingly voluntary (Laursen & Williams, in press). That is, parents and children choose when and how often to interact, so outcomes are apt have a powerful influence on future exchanges.

The transformation of parent-child relationships is linked to an increase in the salience of peer relationships. As friendships grow closer, the intensity and exclusivity of parent-child relationships decrease. Interactions between young children are often based on simple forms of initiation and responsiveness to gestures and expressions. As social understanding develops, interactions become more complex and co-ordinated (Dunn, 1993). Although primarily organised around play and common activities, early friendships build on internal representations, setting the stage for the development of new interpersonal skills (Davies, 1984; Elicker, Englund, & Sroufe, 1992). Across middle childhood and adolescence, friendships grow to incorporate abstract concepts such as loyalty and intimacy (Hartup, 1993). It is for this reason that some have argued that adolescent friendships represent the first true relationship experiences (Sullivan, 1953). Certainly friendships are the earliest voluntary relationship; children acquire social exchange rules in interactions with friends and apply them in other close relationships (Graziano, 1984). Autonomy promotes the relative importance of these principles, as exchanges in voluntary relationships increasingly take place in open-field settings apart from adult supervision (Laursen, 1996). Taken together, friendships resemble parent-child relationships in that internal representations form the basis of later advances in interdependence and social understanding.

Sibling relationships appear to follow a distinct developmental trajectory. In contrast to age-related changes in parent-child and friend relationships, positive features of sibling relationships decrease across childhood and adolescence and negative features increase (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Little is known about how internal representations impact sibling relationships, although there is evidence that they shape qualitative features of the relationship (Teti & Ablard, 1989). Sibling relationships gradually shift from being involuntary to being voluntary; the more children control their own environment, the more say they have in the extent to which they socialise with siblings. Moreover, the asymmetries between siblings that derive from age differences diminish as the relationship grows more egalitarian with progressive advances in social

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understanding (Dunn, 1983). It follows that the importance of interdependence in sibling relationships increases as a function of social and cognitive development.

In their earliest phases, romantic relationships are predicated on principles of social exchange. Participants are attracted to one another by the promise of mutually beneficial interactions (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Although the salience of particular benefits may change as a function of development, the importance of a favourable ratio of rewards to costs does not (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, in press). Interdependence declines in importance as romantic relationships grow more committed and less voluntary. Internal relationship representations formed early in life may be recreated later in romantic relationships (Shaver & Hazan, 1988). That adolescents have a lower incidence of secure romantic attachments than adults has prompted some to speculate that advances in social understanding and social experience facilitate improved internal representations of romantic relationships (Furman & Wehner, 1994). This suggests a progressive decline in the importance of environmental and psychological processes, as cognitive processes increasingly guide the behaviour of romantic partners.

Most close relationships respond to changes in other relationships. For instance, friends help adolescents renegotiate relationships with parents (Ryan & Lynch, 1989). The ascription of new meanings to friendship may be a critical aspect of the successful transformation of parent-adolescent relationships (Blos, 1962). As the quality of adolescent relationships with parents declines, some functions may be transferred to friends. Friendships, in turn, are eventually supplanted by romantic relationships. Just as supportive functions shift from parents to friends during early adolescence, they shift again from friends to romantic partners during late adolescence and early adulthood (Furman, 1989). On the surface, alterations in relationship interdependence appear to drive these changes, but there may also be deep structure revisions in attachment processes that contribute to relationship realignment.

Variability in the principles that guide relationships demonstrates the need for a domain-specific developmental model. Domain specificity was a messy and disruptive notion when introduced into the field of cognitive development and it is likely to prove likewise for the field of social development. Particularly challenging will be the task of disentangling normative individual development and normative relationship development from differences between individuals in relationship preferences and experiences, and differences between relationships in patterns of social interaction. Yet it is clear that the most parsimonious formulation of close relationship processes is one that recognises different relationship principles during different developmental periods.

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CONCLUSION

Relationships are the bread and the thread of life, they define existence and provide it with meaning (Vandenberg, 1991). Developmental needs motivate individuals to engage in relationships and cultural prescriptions define relationship responses to these needs. Thus, relationships are a context for development as well as a product of it.

We have proposed a developmental guide to the organisation of family and close peer relationships. As with most guides, this one has limitations: It takes the intrepid traveller only so far down the well-trod trail before reaching uncharted territories. Yet, developmental scholars are uniquely suited to the challenge ahead. Our trademark emphasis on description and concern for the individual in context offers a compelling approach to the study of relationships. A basic descriptive account of relationships reveals a dynamism in relationship experiences and in their adaptive influences, suggesting that the study of relationships and the study of development must necessarily be joined if either is to be properly understood.

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