

# HEALTHY AND FRAGILE INTERPERSONAL SECURITY

## What We Know and Where We Need to Go

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The chapters included in this section all deal with interpersonal security. They convey much information about what interpersonal security is, how interpersonal security is gained, how it is lost and quite a bit about what its consequences are. Each tells a coherent and interesting story. Yet how do all the pieces of knowledge fit together to form a coherent picture of interpersonal security, including its sources, nature and consequences? Though we will not be able to provide a perfectly clear picture, we aim to paint parts of it and provide some guideposts.

We start with what these chapters suggest interpersonal security *is*. Next, we divide ways of striving for interpersonal security (and the nature of the resultant interpersonal security) into healthy strivings and less healthy forms of interpersonal security striving (and resultant interpersonal security). By health we are referring to interpersonal security striving not just leading to a sense of safety in the moment but also compatible with maintaining the high-quality relationships that sustain interpersonal security across time and maintain partner security and well-being as well. We take note of the fact that some of the present authors focus mainly on understanding the healthy side of security strivings; some on the fragile, less healthy side; and some on both. Third, we comment on a fact about interpersonal security that is touched on in these chapters but only briefly. It is that interpersonal security is grounded both in the reality of a person's social circumstances and in motivationally biased perceptions and further that this distinction cross-cuts our healthy/unhealthy divide.

Finally, we address what seems to be needed to make progress going forward. We need to integrate terminology and theory, we need to develop a new theory that suggests how various forms of striving for (and attaining) interpersonal security fit together—which ones are additive, which can substitute for one another and which interfere with one another. Picking up on the research reported by Lemay (this volume), we emphasize the importance of conducting more truly dyadic studies that include measures of partner motivation and biases, both the positive motivations he studied and negative ones, as well as measures of target persons' motivations and biases.

### The Nature of Interpersonal Security

Being personally secure inheres in a person feeling safe, mentally and physically. Stated another way, a lack of personal security means a person feels mentally and/or physically vulnerable and at risk. Yet what does it mean to be *interpersonally* secure? Here we define it as feeling personally secure, mentally and/or physically, as a result of how a person relates to other people. This is,

notably, a broader definition than many use to define interpersonal security. Interpersonal security can be something felt in the moment, a more enduring state or even a trait of a person.

The authors of the six chapters included in this section all take positions consistent with this basic view of the nature of interpersonal security, as do many other researchers represented in the wider literature. Yet it is a bare-bones viewpoint. The authors of the present set of chapters each add their own useful details regarding the nature of interpersonal security—details that are sometimes shared, sometimes not. For instance, in their chapter on ostracism, Wesselmann, Hales, Ren and Williams say that feeling interpersonally secure includes at least four senses: feeling one belongs to social groups, feeling one's existence has meaning, feeling one has control over one's life and being high in self-esteem. Mikulincer and Shaver agree that self-esteem and a sense of control are important components of feeling interpersonally secure, writing that secure people have higher self-esteem and a "sense of personal worth, competence, and mastery," and they, as well as Gillath and Karantzas (along with other attachment researchers), point out that feeling interpersonally secure includes believing both that one has someone to turn to in times of high stress (a safe haven) and that one has someone who serves as a secure base from which one can venture forth and explore safely. Mikulincer and Shaver explicitly point out that a sense of security (or lack thereof) includes declarative knowledge and also procedural knowledge in the form of if-then consequences, such as, "If I encounter an obstacle and/or become distressed, I can approach a significant other for help; he or she is likely to be available and supportive; I will experience relief and comfort as a result of proximity to this person; I can then return to other activities."

It is worth noting that the present authors' elaborations on what it means to be interpersonally secure include both some components that are inherently interpersonal (e.g. feeling that one belongs to groups, having another person serve as a secure base and safe haven) and other components that are not themselves inherently interpersonal but that presumably arise (at least in part) from the nature of people's interdependence with others (e.g. feeling that one has control over one's life).

### **Two Broad Categories of Interpersonal Security: Healthy, Relationally Based Interpersonal Security and Less Healthy, More Fragile Interpersonal Security Based on Individual Self-Protection**

Striving for and, especially, attaining security through interpersonal means might seem to be, very generally, a good, healthy process. Yet the present set of chapters and the wider literature make clear that there exist *both* healthy, generative ways to strive for and maintain interpersonally based security *and also* common and less healthy, more fragile, but still fundamentally interpersonal ways in which people strive to feel (and at times actually feel) more personally secure.

#### ***Healthy Interpersonal Security***

Consider healthy interpersonal security first. It appears to require and arise primarily from the formation of non-contingently responsive relationships (Clark & Aragon, 2014). Here we further suggest that adding additional types of relationships can contribute to (but not substitute for) interpersonal security.

#### ***Healthy Interpersonal Security Includes Responsiveness***

In much extant relationship science literature as well as in the current chapters by Gillath and Karantzas, Mikulincer and Shaver, and Lemay, researchers emphasize that a person has interpersonal security when that person has established relationships with partners who are (or who are perceived to be) non-contingently responsive to them across time. Striving for such relationships

is also one of 11 goal strivings included in Grouzet et al.'s circumplex model, which Tomczyk, Yu and Zhou discuss, namely the goal to affiliate (a desire to have satisfying relationships with family and friends), with a sample item tapping this goal being, "I will have a committed, intimate relationship."

Indeed, relationship science researchers generally agree that knowing one has others in one's life who are motivated to promote one's welfare is crucial and central to feeling interpersonally secure. See, for example, Gillath and Karantzas's and Mikulincer and Shaver's discussions of *secure people* (i.e. those who are low in both anxiety and avoidance) as examples. See also Reis, Clark and Holmes, 2004, and Reis and Clark, 2013, for an overview of the concept of responsiveness and its importance to people.

According to attachment theorists, including Gillath and Karantzas and Mikulincer and Shaver (represented here), people can and often do achieve this type of felt interpersonal safety through the activation of an evolved behavioral attachment system, the goal of which is to achieve an encompassing sense of physical and emotional safety. Early in life, infants presumably forge attachment bonds with responsive caretakers and, in turn, form internal models of their attachment figure(s) as caring, and of themselves as worthy of care. Then, in times of need, these attachment figures provide protection and relief (a safe haven), thus helping the child to maintain and/or regain a sense of security when threatened. In addition, during non-threatening times, the attachment figure and the associated working model of self and other allow children to cope with anticipatory stress and explore their worlds confidently and securely, with attachment figures serving as a secure base. As Gillath and Karantzas illustrate in this volume, such people also behave in more pro-social ways generally, something that is likely to build *additional* responsive relationships and therefore likely to build *additional* felt interpersonally based security in their lives as well as in those of others. The security built through successful attachment processes presumably extends through adulthood.

Other relationship researchers more generally agree that felt interpersonal safety inheres in having a relationship partner (or partners) who will be responsive to one without contingencies—individuals who promote and/or protect one's welfare (Clark & Lemay, 2010; Le, Impett, Kogan, Webster & Cheng, 2013), individuals whom one also trusts (Simpson, 2007). Having such partners allows one to embrace the relationship as a source of support and, importantly, to move away from preoccupation with regulating interpersonal risk (Murray, Holmes & Collins, 2006). Among adults, much of this responsiveness occurs in mutually responsive relationships between peers. Friendships, romantic relationships and family relationships often (but not always) exemplify mutually responsive relationships.

What such relationships afford that appears to be invaluable to interpersonal security is assurance that a person is not alone in being responsible for his or her own welfare. Others care, and, importantly, it is the perception of that care that assures people they will be attended to by others as needs and desires arise. This allows people to drop a vigilant, chronic self-focus. They can instead maintain a flexible, relational focus of attention—focusing on themselves and how others can support them when they do have a pressing need and desire, shifting focus to partners when a partner has pressing needs and desires or neither, when neither person demands attention but both may fruitfully engage in mutually beneficial interactions (Clark, Graham, Williams & Lemay, 2008). The ability and tendency to focus on the self (when needs are pressing) and on what others can do for the person have obvious links to enhanced interpersonal security. The ability to focus on partners and to support them has clear ties to building and maintaining relationships as well as to enhancing those relationships, and doing so, in turn, maintains a basis for one's own interpersonal security at the same time as it leads others to feel interpersonally secure. Finally, an ability to let the self and partner fade into the background while one engages in mutually enjoyable activities will also enhance a person's well-being and sense of acceptance, belonging and meaning.

### *Additional Types of Relationships Likely Contribute to Healthy Forms of Interpersonal Security*

It is important to note (and rarely noted) that whereas achieving relationships that are, and are perceived to be, non-contingently responsive appears to be *necessary* and *central* to have a strong sense of interpersonal security (for reasons outlined above), success in establishing a wider variety of types of relationships, relationships that are also based on interpersonal trust (but on different norms for interactions), almost certainly adds to an individual's sense of mental and physical safety. Having a steady, fair and well-functioning relationship with an employer that results in one being able to bring in money and that, ideally, is also a source of satisfaction and of admiration from others undoubtedly heightens security. It is another distinct source of interpersonal security and not equivalent with that produced by the existence of well-functioning communally responsive relationships, but it is a form of interpersonal security nonetheless.

Conceptually, why can such a relationship add to a sense of interpersonal security? There are a number of reasons. First, any person's personal set of attachment and communal relationship partners cannot and, reasonably, sometimes will not take care of *all* of that person's needs and desires. Communal partners may lack the ability to do so, they may have pressing needs of their own to which to attend, or they may have obligations in stronger communal relationships that interfere with their ability to meet a person's needs and desires (Mills, Clark, Ford & Johnson, 2004). Indeed, in all but the strongest of communal relationships, responsiveness is implicitly bounded. Friends, most family members and many romantic partners will do many things for us but likely will not pay our college tuition nor give up a job to care for us when we are ill. Having a trusting (secure) exchange relationship with an employer allows one to take care of problems that one's set of responsive personal relational partners cannot. One can hire a plumber when one's pipes leak and one has no plumbers among one's close personal relationships. One can pay one's own college tuition when to do so either would be too much of an infringement on one's close relational partner's own needs and/or would exceed the strength of one's communal relationships. The ability to utilize these kinds of exchange relationships affords one extra security that is truly interpersonal, albeit interpersonal in a different way.

Notably, such exchange relationships are just one type of relationship people may profitably add to their set of interpersonal relationships to increase a sense of interpersonal security. In addition, people may forge or enter into other types of relationships, such as relationships with authority figures who make decisions on their behalf and/or who coordinate cooperation between people, and these relationships too may enhance felt interpersonal security (of yet another flavor). (See Fiske's [1992] discussion of relating to people as authorities. See Bugental's [2000] theorizing as well for more insight into the idea that we need to be able to reliably relate to a wide number of people in a *variety of ways* for optimal interpersonal security.)

In sum, it is our view that the optimal, healthiest and least fragile route to interpersonal security lies in the formation of attachment and other mutually and non-contingently responsive relationships. They allow people to drop constant self-protection and to utilize flexible relational foci of attention to enhance their own and others' welfare. The dropping of vigilance and reduction of stress that interpersonal security forged in these ways affords almost certainly constitutes most of the reason the existence of personal relationships is linked to better mental and physical health (Argyle, 1992; Cohen, 2004). Without diminishing the importance, indeed the necessity, of the person having stable, responsive personal relationships, we further believe that adding other, additional, exchange and authority ranking relationships can boost interpersonal security yet further.

Importantly, the fact that these relationships also promote people's tendencies to be pro-social generally, as discussed by Gillath and Karantzas, also bodes well for the pro-socially oriented person forming additional mutually responsive relationships, enhancing interpersonal security yet further.

### Acceptance

Researchers sometimes talk about interpersonal security not so much in terms of forging responsive relationships but rather in terms of being (and perceiving that one is) accepted and valued by others. Talking about security in this way is not the same as, but overlaps and does not conflict with, talking about it in terms of responsiveness. In this volume Lemay and Wesselmann et al. use the term "acceptance" to refer to interpersonal security. Lemay notes that several individual difference measures often utilized in relationship research—measures of low self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), of rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996) and of attachment anxiety—all "tap chronic doubts about whether one is accepted and valued by others," and thus a lack of interpersonal security. Leary and others have conceptualized self-esteem as a sociometer, or as an index of acceptance by others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995).

Feeling accepted by others would seem to be part of healthy interpersonal security. Acceptance is a part of interpersonal security and intimacy. In fact, mutually responsive relationships require acceptance. Yet acceptance can exist outside of the particular dyadic relationships one forges, as well. It is clearly good and interpersonally reassuring to be accepted.

### *Other, Less Healthy and More Fragile Interpersonal Routes to Security*

Notably, this set of chapters, taken as a whole, goes well beyond a discussion of the types of interpersonal security that we here deem to be healthy, optimal, relationship-based forms of striving for (and achieving) interpersonal security. In particular, the chapters by Freis, Brown and Arkin; Tomczyk et al.; Gillath and Karantzas; and Mikulincer and Shaver (insofar as they discuss anxious attachment styles) make clear the existence of *other, conceptually distinct*, not-so-optimal (but common) forms of striving for (and sometimes establishing) interpersonal security apart from forming stable, mutually responsive (and other) relationships.

What this means is that some people often (and most people sometimes) engage in *interpersonal* processes other than the healthy processes we have already discussed with the apparent goal being to achieve a sense of interpersonal security. Not just that, but these processes can result in at least a temporary sense of security—a fact that surely accounts for their prevalence in our daily lives.

### *Unhealthy Ways of Striving for Interpersonal Security*

These interpersonal processes include such things as striving to be better than and therefore more admired than others (Freis et al.; and see some types of goal striving described by Tomczyk et al.), conforming to others and fitting in so as not to be rejected (see this and a wider variety of forms of goal strivings described by Tomczyk et al.), being aggressive and dominating other people (Freis et al.; Wesselmann et al.) or becoming clingy and demanding, not necessarily because one needs support, but because one fears losing it (see Mikulincer & Shaver's discussion of anxious attachment).

In addition, researchers not represented in this volume have identified yet more social strategies in which people engage, presumably in efforts to feel more secure—strategies such as drawing closer to others who will reflect positively on them and distancing from those who will reflect negatively on them (Tesser, 1988), engaging in downward comparisons (Wills, 1981) and even actively undermining close others' performances so as to look better by comparison (Tesser & Smith, 1980). To the extent to which these strategies work to make a person feel better about himself or herself and secure, the resultant state might be fairly called interpersonal security because these strategies too are dependent on other people. Yet these are very different means to strive for interpersonal security compared to forming enduring, supportive relationships with others. They are more individualistic, more competitive and more self-focused. Whatever state of interpersonal

security they achieve as a result is also likely to be distinct in feel and nature from security based in well-functioning interpersonal relationships. It should be more fragile and fleeting, less based on a sense that others care for one and more based on a sense that one is important and is perceived to be important, and that one can control others through one of a variety of means (e.g. through intimidation if the strategy is aggression, through ingratiation if the strategy is conforming, through supplication if the strategy is becoming clingy, through exemplification if the strategy is admiration; see Jones & Pittman, 1982, for a discussion of these sources of influence).

### *Why Are These Forms of Interpersonal Security Striving (and Attainment) Not Healthy Forms?*

We have already said that whatever sense of security is obtained by engaging in efforts to be admired by others, to come out ahead of others by comparison, to be the target of positive reflections and not of negative reflections, and so on, is a less healthy form of interpersonal security striving than is forming and maintaining well-functioning relationships with others. From where do these other forms arise? Why are these less healthy or less adaptive forms of security striving?

The motivated engagement in all the forms of security striving that we have labeled unhealthy or fragile here appears to arise, primarily, from the failure of prior healthier forms of striving for and attaining interpersonal security through relationships. Wesselmann et al., for instance, say that *first* people are ostracized, *then* they aggress. Attachment researchers such as Mikulincer and Shaver and Gillath and Karantzas say that infants are born built to seek support, and caretakers are built to provide it. Then, if support is not forthcoming, hyper-activation of attachment strivings (and use of anxious clinging to achieve security, for instance) and avoidance of close relationships follow. Intimidation, aggression, and narcissistic strivings likely follow failure of healthier forms of security striving. So too do we believe that making comparisons with others to see who comes out ahead does not characterize happy, well-functioning, communally based relationships; rather, it appears to arise as a result of the distress in relationships that has most likely been caused by the neglect of needs in those relationships (Grote & Clark, 2001; Grote, Naylor & Clark, 2002). Strategies such as engaging in reflection processes and social comparisons seem to occur most when people are already low in self-esteem (Tesser & Cornell, 1991) or have had their self-esteem lowered in the recent past (Cialdini et al., 1976).

There may also be cascades of styles of interpersonal security seeking that move from the healthier forms of security seeking to increasingly interpersonally destructive ways of doing so. We would guess, for instance, that people do not become the sort of narcissists about whom Freis et al. write if they have not first been frustrated in healthier interpersonal security seeking. Freis et al. point out that it is, in turn, when narcissistic admiration seeking fails that narcissists turn to aggression. In other words, perhaps there is a sort of cascade of security seeking that starts with the failure of attachment systems such as those discussed by Mikulincer and Shaver and Gillath and Karantzas, moves to narcissistic seeking of admiration of the sort that Freis et al. describe and then moves to aggression directed at partners who might fail to admire one.

Regarding why these strategies are not healthy ways in which to seek security, consider first that the motivation to engage in all these unhealthy forms of security striving is largely individualistic and self-focused in nature. They do not involve two (or more) people's shared motivation to be mutually supportive in order to feel secure. The narcissist desires admiration for himself or herself; his or her audience generally does not have a motivation to be admiring. The anxious person wishes to cling to partners for his or her safety; most partners do not want to be overly clung to (smothered) by their partner. The person who engages in social comparison wishes to come out ahead; his or her comparison targets do not cooperate by wishing to come out behind. What the self-focused nature of these sorts of security striving means is that the burden of

maintaining these sorts of interpersonally based security therefore rests primarily on one person. The security-seeking individual must do this alone. His or her partners may even actively resist these strivings. This is almost certainly stressful. In contrast, healthy forms of interpersonal security seeking generally involve two people sharing the motivation to care and be cared for, to give and to receive in fair exchanges, or to form an authority ranking relationship. Thus, healthy forms of interpersonal security are supported by two (or more) persons; less healthy forms of interpersonal security are not.

Second, and importantly, the forms of interpersonal security striving we have here called unhealthy generally actively undermine the healthy, sustainable forms of interpersonal security striving outlined above. Consider research described by Freis et al. as a first illustration of how self-focused security striving (that is nonetheless reliant on other people) can undermine relationships that otherwise could have provided more sustainable interpersonal security. These authors point to research by Campbell, Bosson, Goheen, Lakey and Kernis (2007) that demonstrated that although narcissists are notably higher than others in pursuing their own agency and although there is little evidence to suggest that their narcissism masks low self-esteem, narcissists are *not* especially concerned with excelling in communal skills (warmth, kindness, nurturance); indeed, they annoy others with their arrogance and lack of empathy for others. Whereas grandiose narcissists can be charismatic and make good leaders, their charm wears off. Ultimately, they are *not* admired by their closest friends, romantic partners and family. Their inclinations to brag and their inability to accept criticism as well their inclinations to display hostility tend to ruin their close relationships, forcing them to move on to new relationship partners, sometimes repeatedly (Campbell & Foster, 2002). These close (but frequently abandoned) relationships are, of course, what we see as the core of healthy longer-term interpersonal security. Freis et al.'s chapter further conveys that another subtype of narcissists, the vulnerable narcissists, also seem to strive to attain admiration and also have grandiose thoughts, yet it appears that they are considerably less "successful" than are grandiose narcissists, so they may not even achieve security in the short run while still paying the price of harming their chances of establishing a firm, enduring sense of interpersonal security through the establishment of long-term communal relationships characterized by mutual understanding, validation and care.

To give another example of security striving undermining supportive relationships, consider the withdrawal of support that can arise from a desire to look better than a partner, particularly a close partner, in a performance domain (cf. Tesser & Smith, 1980). Withdrawing support from a partner in order to look good is a self-focused rather than partner-focused behavior, and it is just the opposite of what close partners desire in well-functioning communal relationships. In addition, drawing closer to a partner when that partner succeeds (to benefit from positive reflection)<sup>1</sup> and withdrawing from the partner when the partner fails (to avoid negative reflection) would seem to reverse the pattern that would be most supportive for partners (who do not need support when they are doing well and do need support when they flounder.)

Conforming to fit in, requires doing so even when conforming does not fit one's own needs and desires. When that happens, it interferes with support seeking in mutually responsive, communal relationships. Aggression in response to ostracism almost surely alienates others and makes them withdraw or hide from one even further; that, in turn, should often produce yet more ostracism, which Wesselmann et al. tell us leads to negative affect, social pain and sometimes depression and learned helplessness.

### Returning to the Question of "What Is Interpersonal Security?"

So, bottom line, what *is* interpersonal security? We reiterate that most generally it is a sense of personal safety arising from the nature of one's interdependence or perceived interdependence with

other people. We believe an enduring and *healthy* sense of interpersonal security arises *primarily* from forging enduring non-contingent responsive relationships with others. We further believe that the ability and willingness to relate to yet others within fair, short- and long-term, mutually beneficial exchange and functional authority ranking relationships will add to the crucial and core sense of interpersonal security that is derived from one's closest, well-functioning, communal relationships.

Security forged by certain other forms of interdependence may work in the moment but is inherently fragile and often interferes with healthier, enduring forms of interpersonal security.

We should add one important caveat. We are saying that it is unhealthy to strive for and rely on forms of interdependent security derived from bragging, name-dropping and other forms of seeking positive reflection and avoiding negative reflection, from conforming just to "fit in" and be liked, from intimidating others and aggressing toward others, and from being narcissistic. We would *not* say that all end states that such striving can achieve are necessarily bad in and of themselves. As Freis et al. point out, narcissists strive for admiration, and they pay costs for doing so. But if one both has healthy, sustainable relationships *and* just happens to also achieve a lot and be admired by others, telling close others about one's accomplishments may very well add to a sense of interpersonal security and acceptance by others, which is just fine and good. Interestingly, when it occurs in the context of existing thriving, responsive relationships, telling partners about accomplishments is unlikely to be seen as bragging. Indeed, the value of those accomplishments to the self is likely to be multiplied through the process of capitalization (Reis et al., 2010).

Indeed, this is a more general point. The very nature of some goal strivings (including those listed in the circumplex that Tomczyk et al. discuss) will be transformed by the relational context. Consider the goal of conformity (to fit in with other people) or the (seemingly) more individualistic goal of self-acceptance (to feel competent and autonomous): when such goals are combined with an *overarching* goal of maintaining healthy, responsive relationships, these goals transform in nature compared to when they are not. In the absence of healthy relationships, conforming to fit in is likely a somewhat desperate act to get others to like you; when it occurs within secure, responsive relationships, it is likely done to benefit others, to ensure the smooth functioning of interactions. When one imagines a person striving to feel competent and to operate autonomously in conjunction with a goal of simultaneously maintaining responsive relationships, what comes to mind is something akin to securely attached children using their attachment figure as a secure base and venturing out to explore the world or to tackle new tasks bolstered by the knowledge that they have support. When one imagines a person striving to feel competent and to operate autonomously in conjunction with an avoidant attachment style and a desire to side-step mutually responsive relationships, it's easy to imagine the narcissists of whom Freis et al. speak.

### **Interpersonal Security Inheres Both in Reality and in Motivated, Biased Perceptions**

A sense of security forged in either healthy or unhealthy interpersonal ways itself ultimately lies within a single person even though both interpersonal security and interpersonal insecurity are forged in large part by realities in one's past and present social lives. We mention that here because although this distinction is clear in the wider literature relevant to interpersonal security, it is not emphasized in this particular volume.

Gillath and Karantzas and Mikulincer and Shaver both emphasize the importance of truly having an initial responsive attachment figure for the existence of personal security. Lemay points out the importance of taking into account the partner, and how the partner *truly* does respond to an insecure person's worries about being cared for, if research is to fully understand the interpersonal



consequences of insecurity. More generally, people almost certainly feel more secure the more support and responsiveness they actually receive from partners.

Yet the chapters here, to some extent, and the broader literature reveal that interpersonal security also involves motivated *intrapersonal* processes that influence a person's sense of *interpersonal* realities and that increase (or decrease, depending on the motivation in question) perceptions of security in ways that depart from reality. Intrapersonally based biases in perception can and do enhance (and detract) from *both* healthy and less healthy forms of interpersonally based security.

Consider first how biases influence healthy forms of interpersonal security. People who are themselves motivated to be responsive to partners are known to *project* their own feelings of responsiveness onto the partner, seeing partners as more responsive than they actually are (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay, Clark & Feeney, 2007; Lemay, Clark & Greenberg, 2010). People have positive illusions about their partners to whom they are committed that are not shared by outside observers (Murray, Holmes & Griffin, 1996), romantic partners are biased to perceive that their sexual desires and their degree of complementarity with one another are greater than is truly the case (de Jong & Reis, 2014), and in committed relationships, people automatically downplay the attractiveness of potential alternative partners who might threaten existing secure relationships, especially when people have a restrictive socio-sexual orientation (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Maner, Gailliot, Rouby & Miller, 2007; Maner, Rouby & Gonzaga, 2008).

Sadly, biases can undermine healthy bases for security as well enhance it. Whereas some people project their desires for communal relationships onto their partners, others project their lack of desire (Lemay et al., 2007; Lemay & Clark, 2008). Avoidantly attached people see partner responsiveness as less voluntary than partners report it to have been (Beck & Clark, 2010); people low in self-esteem seem to give partners less credit for their responsiveness the more responsive those partners are (Anderson, 2012), and they estimate that their partners care for them less than they truly do (Murray, Holmes, MacDonald & Ellsworth, 1998).

Motivated biases can also shore up or undermine security that is forged in interpersonally less healthy ways as well. The fact that motivated bias can shore up narcissists' sense of security is captured in this volume by Freis et al.'s discussion of how narcissists who pursue admiration are sometimes psychologically well defended or, in other words, motivationally biased against perceiving relational partners' actual negative reactions to their efforts.

The point is that to fully understand interpersonal security we must combine an understanding of the degree to which interpersonal security arises from interpersonal reality with the degree to which intrapersonal security lies in motivated perception. Moreover, we need to understand how people's motivational biases combine and interact with their partners' motivations to shape interpersonal security. Lemay's chapter illustrates this point well.

### **Studying Interpersonal Security in Truly Interpersonal Ways Is Essential; Taking Both People's Relational Goals and Related Motivational Biases Into Account Is Important**

By definition, interpersonal security involves other people. However, in much work on the topic of interpersonal security no partners are involved in the research process (though participants are often asked about their partners); in much other work the "partner" is a confederate or someone present only virtually. Although it is costly and requires more effort, researchers in relationship science generally, and in the domain of interpersonal security specifically, have increasingly included both partners in the research process. However, as aptly pointed out by Lemay, even when partners are included, the data collected from them typically serve either as outcome measures for a target person's beliefs and behavior (for instance, researchers have collected measures of what people think of narcissistic versus non-narcissistic partners) or as a benchmark for a target person's beliefs

(to assess the targets' biases in perceiving partner interest or intentions, benchmark measures of those variables have been collected from partners).

Our understanding of interpersonal security will benefit greatly from an expansion of the types of measures we collect from partners as well as from targets to include measures of *both* persons' motivations, goals and associated biases. The empirical work reviewed in Lemay's chapter illustrates this point well. He reviews research that had converged to paint a gloomy picture of the relational fate of interpersonally insecure people: they are biased to perceive others as non-supportive, and they behave in such ways as to turn that perception into reality. Yet, Lemay points out, such research fails to take into account that partners may be motivated to correct that bias and prevent behavioral confirmation/individual self-fulfilling prophecies, thereby maintaining their relationships. When partner goals include maintaining a target's security, insecure people's biased perceptions of partners are shown *not* to result in self-fulfilling prophecies.

What if more truly dyadic research including measures of both the target person's and the partner's motivations and goals were to be conducted? Consider, as one example, what might emerge from adding research including true partners and their motivations to the interesting work on ostracism covered by Wesselmann et al. These researchers review research showing that ostracized individuals may respond pro-socially or work harder on group tasks, presumably as a way to reconnect (Williams & Sommer, 1997); conform more closely to norms (Williams et al., 2000); comply with others more (Carter-Sowell, Chen & Williams, 2008); and demonstrate increased interest in joining new groups (Maner, DeWall, Baumeister & Schaller, 2007). Yet, Wesselmann et al., point out, they also may aggress against other people, whether these people were originally involved in the target's ostracism or not (Buckley, Winkel & Leary, 2004; Twenge, Baumeister, Tice & Stucke, 2001; Warburton, Williams & Cairns, 2006).

What predicts which of these responses will take place? Wesselmann says that it depends on the *individual's* needs. Those with inclusionary needs should behave more pro-socially; those with power, control and a need for meaning may aggress. We do not doubt that individual needs matter. Yet this leaves out a consideration of partner motivation for ostracizing a person in the first place as well as target persons' perceptions of those motivations. What if partner motives and goals were taken into account? Some people ostracize partners in the face of behavior that violates societal and relationship norms with a goal of eliminating that behavior. An ostracizer may be signaling to the person being ostracized, for instance, that the ostracized person has neglected the ostracizer's needs. To make our example even more concrete, a child who is screaming while a parent is trying to talk on the phone might be given a time-out to signal to that child that norms have been broken. When such motives drive ostracism and occur in the context of a communal relationship, ostracism may be (and may be seen by both parties as) consistent with maintaining mutually responsive, security-enhancing interpersonal relationships. Partners who ostracize because they are motivated to maintain and strengthen relationships may elicit constructive behavior from the ostracized person. In such a case, partner motives and actions, not just the ostracizer's needs, may be what elicits constructive rather than destructive actions.

On the other hand, an ostracizer might be motivated by more selfish goals—to enhance his or her own image by distancing from an embarrassing partner or to demonstrate his or her own superiority, power or importance. Such motivations for ostracism may be detected by targets as well and would seem more likely to elicit aggression. This speculation fits with other research that Wesselmann et al. review showing that people who have interdependent construals and those who are reminded of close relationships recover more quickly from ostracism than do others. Our point here is that taking a truly dyadic approach to research in which *both* partners' motivations and goals (including goals for the self, partner and relationship) are considered may go far in enhancing our understanding of interpersonal security.

### **Needs for the Future: Integrating Extant Empirical Work, Integrating Theory, Taking Into Account Relational Context in All Its Complexity**

A great deal is known about the nature and consequences of interpersonal security, and much of that knowledge is covered in these chapters. Yet the chapters in this volume (taken as a set) and the wider literature on interpersonal security suggest that researchers in this area have important tasks before them. First, to understand the landscape of interpersonal security, there is a pressing need for integration of both theory and empirical work on interpersonal security. (See Simpson & Rholes, 2010, for a similar call for integration.)

#### ***Integrating Use of Terminology/Jargon***

For one thing, researchers from various laboratories and traditions might work toward recognizing and taking into account the fact that despite their frequent use of different terminology, they are often conducting conceptually overlapping work. There are a wide variety of individual differences in terms and associated measures that all appear to capture a lack of felt interpersonal security: low self-esteem, rejection sensitivity, anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. As Lemay points out at the beginning of his chapter, whereas there are some differences in these constructs, so too is there much conceptual overlap in what they tap. Considering and reviewing them together (as he does at the start of his chapter) will help in achieving a comprehensive review of what is known in this domain. Whereas Lemay focuses on the common core of what constructs with different names and measures tap, reviewers might at times focus on whether each taps something unique or more than one thing that other measures do not; what, conceptually, those things are; and just what that means for research arising from different laboratories.

#### ***Integrating Theory and Research***

More generally, broadly and importantly, we need to integrate theory and research coming from different laboratories. Just sticking to the present set of chapters, it is worth asking: How does work on ostracism fit with that on attachment theory? How does work on how self-esteem influences security striving fit with work on how attachment styles influence security striving? Are anxious people especially likely to conform with groups and try to fit in (Tomczyk et al.), whereas avoidant people choose some of the non-interpersonal goals included in the second circumplex model presented by Tomczyk et al.? Might grandiose narcissism arise from avoidant attachment, and other narcissism arise from anxious attachment? What are the links between all the types of goal strivings highlighted in the circumplex model that Tomczyk et al. describe and the goal strivings of anxious, avoidant and secure individuals? The list could go on. Many different research groups are tackling issues of interpersonal security, but there is little cross-communication between them or integration of ideas. (This is, of course, a challenge, more broadly, in psychology.)

#### ***Considering Relational Contexts and Relational Constructs as Captured in Those Relational Contexts More Systematically and Self-Consciously***

As already noted, a large part of the needed integration must come from researchers figuring out how their concepts and measures relate (or do not relate) to one another. Yet the challenges for integration go beyond conceptually integrating terms and the different theoretical frameworks people use. Studies of interpersonal security have been conducted in many different relational

contexts. Much research involves studies of romantic couples (a great deal, although certainly not all, of adult attachment work involves studies of romantic couples), a small amount of work has been done using friends, and much of the ostracism work involves people who have never met before and in some cases will never meet (e.g. work using the Cyberball technique, which Wesselmann et al. point out has been used in over 150 studies of ostracism). These distinct relational contexts matter.

Differences in populations of participants need to be taken into account if research and theory in this field are to be integrated across laboratories. In taking relational context into account, however, we believe it will prove to be helpful if researchers interested in interpersonal security move far beyond considering the relational context in terms of lay language terms (e.g. are strangers or romantic partners being studied?). Researchers need to take advantage of accumulated knowledge of relational constructs, measures of those constructs, and how these constructs are captured in the populations of people being studied. These constructs include commitment, trust, power (of various sorts), comparison levels, comparison levels for alternatives, investments, satisfaction with relationships, avoidance of relationships, anxiety about relationships, and the communal strength of a relationship—and the list could go on.

These constructs vary with relational context as that context is captured in a variety of ways. They emerge as chronic individual differences in orientations that exist between people. They emerge in the relational character of particular relationships (the “personality” of relationship). They vary with relational histories and relationship stages, and they vary with the place in which a particular relationship sits within a larger social network of relationships.

Of course, much extant work on interpersonal security *has* been thought of in terms of these constructs, and this work has been placed in a relational context, particularly a relational context as captured in chronic individual differences and particularly the constructs of attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety and self-esteem. For example, when facing their own interpersonal anxiety-producing situations, people with secure attachment styles draw closer to relational partners, seeking support from them when they need it, and when facing a partner’s anxiety, they increase the amount of support given. Those with avoidant styles behave in exactly the opposite fashion (Simpson, Rholes & Nelligan, 1992). Each group presumably acts as they do to maintain a sense of security. To give another example of considering individual differences in relational orientation proving helpful in understanding responses to insecurity, when faced with a partner’s good performance those high in self-esteem write reasonably warm notes, whereas those low in self-esteem become colder (Lemay & Clark, 2009). In both cases, people high or low in avoidance or high or low in self-esteem are presumably striving to maintain a sense of personal security. Yet the interpersonal ways in which they strive to do so are strikingly different.

Yet more careful consideration of relational constructs as captured in relational contexts that are themselves captured in the various ways noted is needed. Doing so will raise many interesting questions. For example, how are the typical antecedents and consequences of ostracism as defined by Wesselmann et al. influenced by the existing relational commitment, trust, power (of various sorts), comparison levels, comparison levels for alternatives, investments, and satisfaction with and communal strength of the relationships in which the ostracism takes place? How is an ostracized individual’s avoidance of relationships, and the ostracized individual’s anxiety about relationships, linked to that individual’s reactions to ostracism? Similarly, how are the antecedents and consequences of each of the goal strivings discussed by Tomczyk et al. influenced by the existing relational commitment, trust, power (of various sorts), comparison levels, comparison levels for alternatives, investments, and satisfaction with and communal strength of the relationships in which those strivings take place (or might have taken place)?

All this is not to say that we do not need more work on relational constructs themselves. We do. Some will overlap with others. Some might be usefully broken down into sub-components. There

are undoubtedly new constructs that will prove to be important to understanding interpersonal security. Our point is, rather, that relationship scientists have amassed a body of knowledge about a set of constructs and their importance to relational functioning that will likely prove useful in efforts to integrate studies of interpersonal security.

***Figuring Out How and When Forms of Interpersonal Security Striving Trade Off Against Each Other, Are Additive and/or Are Toxic to One Another***

We also need to know how forms of striving to achieve interpersonal security cumulate, “trade off” against one another and/or are toxic to one another. We have suggested here that having sets of relationships that provide good coverage of a single person’s non-overlapping interpersonal security needs ought to build interpersonal security in an additive manner. Yet that idea remains untested.

We can also imagine that certain combinations and numbers of (potentially) well-functioning relationships in which people wish to be non-contingently responsive to one another’s needs actually detract from one another. This may occur, for instance, when people strive to form and maintain too many mutually responsive communal relationships and find that they simply cannot keep up with them all. All may suffer, and this too may detract from interpersonal security. So too may one communal partner’s jealousy of other communal partners result when people have multiple responsive relationships, altering the interpersonal security a person derives from his or her total set of communal relationships (Gomillion, Gabriel & Murray, 2014).

Finally, we need to investigate how types of security forged through distinct inter- and intrapersonal means may and do play off against each other. A small amount of work has been done on this. Tomczyk et al. clearly raise and theorize about this issue when they say that goal strivings lying across the circumplex from one another conflict with one another, whereas those lying adjacent on the two circumplex models they present are compatible. Yet more empirical research on this is needed.

Empirically, Clark, Greenberg, Hill, Clark-Polner and Roosth (2010) have found that when people are experimentally induced to feel more interpersonally secure (as a result of being reminded of responsiveness in their lives), they value their material goods (a non-interpersonal source of security) less, suggesting one type of trade-off in interpersonal and individual security striving. In separate work, Huang, Ackerman and Bargh (2012) show that imagining that one has physical superhero powers lessens one’s negative reactions to ostracism and lessens the rejected person’s motives to reconnect socially with others, suggesting that feeling physically invulnerable may lessen one’s drive to achieve interpersonal security, suggesting another type of trade-off between interpersonal and individual security strivings. Freis et al. (this volume) report research showing that as narcissists strive to excel interpersonally and be admired, they often trade off opportunities to maintain and/or to develop close, responsive relationships.

More fully understanding such trade-offs and the likely differences in the ultimate feelings of security that result from different forms and combinations of security striving would be of value.

**Concluding Comments**

Humans are highly social beings. Mostly for good, yet sometimes for ill, their physical and mental well-being and sense of security are tied up with other humans. The chapters in this section contribute a great deal to our understanding of interpersonal security. At this point, understanding interpersonal security requires not just more research within extant theories, laboratories and traditions but, very importantly, the integration of research and theory together with efforts to place

the work within a relational context, taking advantage of constructs about which researchers have already gained much understanding.

### Note

- 1 Drawing close to successful partners for capitalization purposes (Reis et al., 2010) is distinct from drawing close to partners for positive reflection. Capitalization seems to happen primarily for partners already in successfully responsive relationships who consider themselves to be “we” rather than two separate individuals. When they do consider themselves to be a “we,” they celebrate partner success with a focus on that partner (Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002) rather than drawing close to a successful partner to look good themselves, a self-focused process.

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