Passionate Love, Companionate Love, and Intimacy

Elaine Hatfield

In the 1960s and 1970s, experimental social psychologists who began to investigate intimacy soon found that such research was still taboo. Intimacy researchers were denounced by irate politicians, religious leaders, people-on-the-street, and even their own colleagues (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Wexler, 1979). In the last few years, however, intimacy research has become not only respectable but fashionable. Social psychologists have begun to theorize about intimacy (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Cook & McHenry, 1979; Hatfield, Traupmann, Spreacher, Utne, & Hay, 1982; Kelley, 1979; Stoller, 1979; Walster & Walster, 1977). Feminists agree that it is a profoundly important concern (Firestone, 1970). Marxists have discovered it (Foucault, 1978; Poster, 1978; Zaretsky, 1976). Even gerontologists have begun to recognize its importance (Huyck, 1977; Reedy & Birren, 1978; Stinnett, Carter, & Montgomery, 1972).

In this chapter, I will review what experimental social psychologists have discovered about intimacy and comment, as a family therapist, on this research. For the last few years, I have worked as a family therapist at the Wisconsin Family Institute (Ackerman, 1966; Bateson, 1972; Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1967; Satir, 1972; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1977, are examples of this approach). In this commentary, I will indicate how the current social-psychological paradigm and the systems paradigm differ, indicate how these differing perspectives lead me to interpret social

Elaine Hatfield • Department of Psychology, University of Hawaii at Manoa, 2430 Campus Road, Honolulu, Hawaii 96822. This research was supported, in part, by a grant from the University of Wisconsin graduate school.

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psychological findings in very different ways, and suggest some radically different directions for future research.

Let us begin by defining our terms—passionate love, companionate love, and intimacy.

Definitions

According to Hatfield and Walster (1978), most people distinguish between two types of love—passionate and companionate love.

Passionate Love

Passionate love, or infatuation, is an intensely emotional state associated with tender and sexual feelings; elation and pain, anxiety and relief. Hatfield and Walster define passionate love this way:

> A state of intense longing for union with another. Reciprocated love (union with the other) is associated with fulfillment and ecstasy. Unrequited love (separation) with emptiness, anxiety, or despair. A state of profound physiological arousal. (p. 9)

Hatfield and Walster (1978) argue that, in passionate love, both cognitive and physiological factors are critically important.

Mind. People's semiconscious assumptions about what they *should* be feeling in a given situation have a profound impact on what they *do* feel in that situation. People learn—from society, parents, friends, and personal experience—what emotions it is appropriate to feel in various settings. They know they should feel joyous excitement when they discover they are loved, and anger and depression when they discover they have been abandoned. People's assumptions as to what it is appropriate to feel turn out to be critically important in determining how people label their confusing and tumultuous feelings. Lovers' semiconscious assumptions about the nature of love partially determine whether love is associated primarily with romanticism, tenderness, sexuality, fulfillment, shyness, guilt, anger, longing, and so forth.

Body. People can experience an emotion only if they have some feelings—if they are physiologically aroused.

Researchers who are interested in the physiology of emotions have long been engaged in a heated debate. Most theorists are aligned with one of two camps—the generalists versus the specificists. Generalists (such as Cannon, 1929; Duffy, 1962; Schachter, 1964) insist that with emotions, it is the physiological similarities that are critical. What is important about joy and anger, love and hate, is the fact that people are experiencing intense, sympathetic, nervous system arousal. Emo-

tional people feel "high": They are experiencing heart palpitations, tremor, flushes, and accelerated breathing.

Specificists, on the other hand, point out that although all emotions have some similarities, there are some critical differences between them. (See Averill, 1969; Ax, 1953; Funkenstein, King, & Drolette, 1953, 1957; Lacey, 1967; Leventhal, in press; Lindsley, 1950.)

Technically, the specificists are correct (Walster & Walster, 1977). In this context, however, the generalist specificist debate, so critical in other contexts, is unimportant. Potentially, love may be a "pure" physiological entity (Money, 1980). But in Western culture, love is so intertwined with a variety of other emotions—reassurance, sexual pleasure, challenge, excitement, anger, fear, frustration, jealousy, and total confusion—that *any* form of arousal is probably capable of contributing to a passionate experience.

Companionate Love

According to Hatfield and Walster (1978) liking and companionate love have much in common: Liking is simply "the affection we feel for casual acquaintances"; companionate love is "the affection we feel for those with whom our lives are deeply entwined" (p. 9).

Theorists are generally agreed on the genesis of liking and companionate love (Berscheid & Walster, 1978). The general psychological principle that threads through virtually all theories of interpersonal attraction is the principle of reinforcement—people like those who reward them and dislike those who punish them.

The Byrne-Clore (1970) Affect Model is one of the most elegant reinforcement models. Basically, it proposes:

1. The stimuli people encounter can generally be classified as rewarding or punishing.

2. Rewarding stimuli arouse positive feelings; punishing stimuli arouse negative ones.

3. People's evaluation of others as "good" or "bad" depends on whether the others arouse positive or negative feelings. How positively or negatively people evaluate others depends on the strength of the aroused affect.

4. Through the process of simple conditioning, any neutral person who is associated with a reward or punishment acquires the capacity to arouse positive or negative feelings, and will therefore be liked or disliked as a consequence. (p. 204)

According to Byrne (1971) this law of attraction can be expressed as follows:

$$A_x = m \left[\frac{\sum (PR_x \times M)}{\sum (PR_x \times M) + \sum (NR_x \times M)} \right] + K$$

That is: "Attraction toward x (A_x) is a positive linear function of the sum of the weighted positive reinforcements (PR_x) (number × Magnitude) associated with x, divided by the total number of weighted positive and negative reinforcements associated with x." In short, people like those who reward them and dislike those who punish them. In fact, people even come to like those who merely happen to be associated with reward and to dislike those who merely happen to be associated with punishment.

Byrne (1971) and Lott and Lott (1974) provide voluminous evidence in support of these propositions. Griffitt (1970) has amassed considerable evidence for his contention that we all practice love—or guilt—by association. Griffitt asked college students to form a first impression of a stranger. Half of the men and women met in a cool, attractive room; the other half met in an uncomfortably hot, ugly room. The men and women who made their judgments in comfortable surroundings ended up liking the stranger more than did those who made their judgments under miserable conditions.

I have reviewed the definitions of interpersonal attraction (i.e., passionate love, liking, and companionate love) that *I* have found most compelling. Other researchers have, of course, proposed other definitions.[1]

[1] Berscheid and Walster (1978) define *Interpersonal Attraction* (or interpersonal hostility) as "an individual's tendency or predisposition to evaluate another person or a symbol of that person in a positive (or negative) way." (p. 3-4). Most investigators have conceptualized attitudes as having three components—a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral component. The cognitive component of an attitude consists of all one's thoughts about the object or class of objects in question. The affective component reflects one's predisposition to evaluate someone positively or negatively. The behavioral component refers to one's tendency to avoid or approach another—to behave in a particular manner towards him or her.

Rubin (1970) set out to distinguish "liking" from "loving." (He did not try to distinguish passionate love from companionate love.) Rubin sifted through a jumble of friends' and lovers', novelists', and scientists' descriptions of friendship and love. He concluded that liking involves an appreciation of the other person, respect, and a feeling that they both have a lot in common. Love includes such elements as idealization of the other, tenderness, responsibility, and wanting to serve and be served by the loved one, intimacy, the desire to share emotions and experiences, sexual attraction, the exclusive and absorptive nature of the relationship, and finally, the couple's relative lack of concern with social norms and constraints. Rubin developed liking and loving scales to reflect these differences.

Other researchers who have attempted to distinguish between the varieties of love include Casswell and Lobsenz (1980), and Lee (1977).

Intimacy

Hatfield, Utne, and Traupmann (1979b) proposed a static definition of intimacy: Intimates are "loving persons whose lives are deeply entwined."

We think of intimacy not as a static state but as a *process*. Thus, we would define intimacy as: a process by which a dyad—in the expression of thought, affect, and behavior—attempts to move more towards complete communication on all levels.

Hatfield et al. (1979) observed that intimate relationships—relationships between best friends, lovers, spouses, parents, and children—are generally marked by a number of characteristics:

1. Intensity of liking/loving.
2. Depth and breadth of information exchange.
3. Value of resources exchanged.
4. Variety of resources exchanged.
5. Substitutability of resources.
6. Commitment.
7. The unit of analysis—from "you" and "me" to "we"

Now that I have defined what I mean by passionate love, companionate love, and intimacy, let me: (1) review what experimental social psychologists know about intimacy—or rather, each of its seven components; and (2) suggest how family therapists might interpret this research, and the directions they would propose for subsequent research.

Intensity of Liking/Loving

Virtually all social psychologists who have investigated interpersonal attraction—liking or love—have assumed that they are unidimensional variables (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Burgess & Huston, 1979; Byrne, 1971; Cook & Wilson, 1979; Houston, 1974; Rubin, 1970). They assume that attraction towards others can vary from extremely positive to extremely negative—loving to liking through disliking to hatred.

My experience as a family therapist, however, has convinced me that this conception of love is wrong. Real intimates' feelings towards one another are more complex than this. Intimates experience a variety of interlocking feelings for one another—they love and mate, are tender and cruel, insist on independence and long to merge with one another.

In life, passionate and companionate love normally co-exist with a complicated array of less pleasant feelings. In fact, there is probably something about sharing painful experiences together that helps to cement a relationship.

I would take an even stronger position than that, however. I would argue that probably the most passionate relationships are those associated with both pleasure and pain—those in which the hope or occasional experience of fulfillment are inextricably mixed with the threat of loss. Indeed, the original meaning of passion was "agony," as in "Christ's passion." "There is some evidence to support this contention. Hatfield and Walster (1978) provide a comprehensive review of the evidence that, under the right conditions, both joy and anguish have the potential for deepening passion. The fact that delight can fuel passion is not so surprising. (Bowlby, 1973; Griffit, May, & Veitch, 1974; Stephan, Berscheid, & Walster, 1971; Walster & Berscheid, 1974, for evidence in support of this common-sense observation.)

There is also some evidence that painful experiences can fuel passion. (Stoller, 1979; Tennov, 1979; Walster & Walster, 1978.)

For example, Dutton and Aron (1974) demonstrated that there is sometimes a close link between fear and sexual attraction. These authors invited men and women to participate in a learning experiment. When the men showed up, they discovered that their partner was a strikingly beautiful woman. They also discovered that by signing up for the experiment, they had gotten into more than they had bargained for. Sometimes the experimenter tried to frighten the men. He warned them that they would be getting some pretty painful electric shocks. At other times, the experimenter assured the men that they had been assigned to a control group, and would be receiving only a barely perceptible tingle of a shock.

Before the supposed experiment was to begin, the experimenter approached each man privately and asked how he felt about the beautiful woman who "happened" to be his partner. How attracted was he to her? For example, "How would you like to ask her out for a date?" "How would you like to kiss her?" The investigators predicted that fear would facilitate attraction. They found that it did. The frightened men were far more attracted to the woman than were the calm and cool men. Such research has not been without its critics (Kendrick & Cialdini, 1977).

Nonetheless, my experience as a family therapist suggests that the most passionate relationships are those in which people love and hate, and where people are attracted and separate from one another.

Depth and Breadth of Information Exchange

What do social psychologists know about the second characteristic of intimacy—depth and breadth of information exchange?

In casual encounters, acquaintances are allowed to reveal only stereotyped information about themselves (they must stay in role). Bankers must pretend to be solid, responsible citizens when dealing with their clients. Children must pretend to be scholars when talking to their teachers. Thus, in casual relations, individuals possess only the sketchiest of information about one another.

In actuality, however, people are far more complex than this. As Montaigne (in Thomas, 1979) observed:

> All contradictions may be found in me ... bashful, insolent; chaste, lascivious; talkative, taciturn; tough, delicate; clever, stupid; surly, affable; lying, truthful; learned, ignorant; liberal, miserly and prodigal: All this I see in myself to some extent according to how I turn.... I have nothing to say about myself absolutely, simply and solidly, without confusion and without mixture, or in one word. (p. 123)

Generally, in intimate relationships, people feel free to reveal far more facets of themselves. As a consequence, intimates share profound information about one another's histories, values, strengths and weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, hopes and fears.

Recently, Altman and Taylor (1973) reviewed the voluminous self-disclosure research. They concluded that, with few exceptions, as intimacy grows, "interpersonal exchange gradually progresses from superficial, non-intimate areas to more intimate, deeper layers of the selves of the social actors" (p. 6). The more intimate people are, the more information they are willing to share with one another (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Huesmann & Levinger, 1976; Jourard, 1964; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969).

Other social psychologists have devoted considerable energy to discovering other variables that govern the degree of self-disclosure. There are some consistent findings: for example, women disclose more to each other than do men, and women receive more disclosures than do men (Jourard, 1971). The amount of information revealed has an enormous impact on the amount of information received (Jourard, 1964). (This is the most consistent result obtained in self-disclosure research; Altman, 1973; Davis & Skinner, 1974; Jourard & Friedman, 1970; Marlatt, 1971; Rubin, 1975; Worthy et al., 1969.)

What are social psychologists' conclusions from this research? Generally, they encourage people to be honest, but not too honest, with one another.

Social psychologists acknowledge that people reap some real benefits when they communicate with others. For example: (1) Disclosure promotes self acceptance. As Jourard (1964) observes:

> A self-alienated person—one who does not disclose himself truthfully and fully—one never loves another person nor can he be loved by the other

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> person. Effective loving calls for knowledge of the object. How can I love a person whom I do not know? How can the person love me if he does not know me? (p. 25)

(2) Honest communication helps people to understand themselves and others (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975). (3) Disclosure adds excitement to a relationship. When intimates complain that their friends and lovers are boring, that usually means that they are afraid to take a risk. If they push beyond the point that is "safe" and begin revealing their feelings, things usually heat up. (4) Finally, social psychologists admit that intimacy isn't a luxury, but a necessity. Epidimeologists have accumulated an abundance of evidence that intimacy and self-disclosure help people maintain their mental and physical health. People with a confidant are less vulnerable to mental illness, especially in times of stress (Brown, Bhrolchain, & Harris, 1975; George, 1978; Jourard, 1964; Larson, 1978; Traupmann & Hatfield, 1979). People with confidants are less vulnerable to a long list of diseases, including coronary heart disease and cirrhosis, than are others (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Butler, 1979; Gore, 1978; Haynes, Feinleib, Levine, Scotch, & Kannel, 1978; Satariano & Syme, 1979; Somers, 1979; Traupmann & Hatfield, in press).

On the other hand, social psychologists warn that it is dangerous to reveal too much, too soon (Derlega & Chaikin, 1975). Both survey and laboratory research have documented some of the pitfalls of excessive self-disclosure. Some examples: People who tell others too much about themselves are seen as peculiar or neurotic (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Chaikin, Derlega, Bayma, & Shaw, 1975; Cozby, 1973). If we think back, we have all probably seen this process in action. I have.

> A group of professors were huddled around a table examining a Ph.D. candidate. A sociologist asked a theoretical question: "What sort of conditions foster deviance?" We were all taken aback when the examinee began illustrating the point he was making. He mentioned that he had cheated on a chemistry exam in high school, gotten a girl pregnant the summer before he went to college, and hit a teacher. He rambled on and on talking about the intimate details of his personal life. The committee sat back, stunned. What was going on? Did he crack under stress? Was he on drugs? Ill?

There are other risks in self-disclosure. Menander, a Greek poet, observed: "If you never tell your secrets to your friend, you will never fear him when he becomes your enemy." Intimates also have reason to worry that if they casually reveal their friends' secrets, their friends may suffer.

Social psychologists conclude, then, that intimates should reveal something of themselves to others, but not too much. There are limits to everything.

The Family Therapist's Reaction

What is the family therapist's reaction to this large body of research? The family therapy perspective suggests two insights that may be useful.

The Value of Interpersonal Attraction

In theorizing about intimacy, social psychologists seem to take it for granted that it is so important for intimates to like and love each other, and so dangerous for intimates to do anything that would cause them to despise, get angry at, or feel guilty toward one another, that they must carefully control the information flow in their relationships. Family therapists would argue that to have a truly intimate relationship—a relationship including a complex of emotions—is far more critical. They tend to assume that it is critically important in life to understand oneself and others. Family therapists argue that real relationships always involve a complex of feelings; intimacy involves care about people as they really are. To them, intimacy is more important than interpersonal attraction.

The Value of Communication

Social psychologists have studied only one way in which intimates may communicate with one another—via linear communication—and they warn that one may get in trouble doing too much of that. Family therapists argue that intimates disclose their feelings to one another in a wide variety of ways (Bateson, 1972) and that true intimacy requires a startling degree of self-disclosure. Intimates may discuss their fantasies and conflicting emotions, act childishly and parentally, and so forth. Intimates know one another.

Perlmutter and Hatfield (1980) analyzed casual versus intimate communication. They found that intimates communicated more than casuals do on three different levels—via linear communication, via process metacommunications, and most importantly via intentional metacommunication. Their analysis runs as follows:

Linear Communication. Both casuals and intimates communicate a series of literal messages by word and gesture. For example, a portion of the information contained in the greeting "good morning" is strictly denotative. It could be conveyed as well by a recorded telephone message or a computer printout.

Metamessages. Bateson (1955) argues that, in every communication, people devote a few neurons to the question: "What does this statement

say about our relationship?" A metacommunication accompanies every linear message: consciously or unconsciously, by means of paralinguistic and kinesic signals—which include changes of facial expression, hesitations, shifts in tempo of speech or movement, overtones of the voice, irregularities of respiration, and so forth. People prescribe and proscribe the limits of their relationships.

Process Metacommunication. Generally, casuals and intimates do not consciously monitor their metacommunications. Perlmutter (1978) has labeled such unconscious communications as "process metacommunications"—communications that are part of the norm-setting process of ordinary communicational transactions.

Intentional Metacommunication. Sometimes, however, people transcend the ordinary communication process. Instead of consciously communicating at the literal level *plus* unconsciously metacommunicating (engaging in process-metacommunication), they begin to metacommunicate intentionally. For example, a lover may observe: "Your tone was a little sharp there. Were you trying to tell me something?" In such instances, intimates begin to talk consciously about the relational context of their messages; the metamessage becomes the literal message.

Perlmutter and Hatfield (1980) argue that intentional metacommunications are the sine qua non of intimate relations. An intimate moment occurs when the ordinary rules of human interactions are suspended and people begin to talk about their own and their partner's thoughts, feelings, and acts; these become primary. The literal content of a message—which is usually paramount—is relegated to a position of unimportance.

Family therapists, then, suggest some new ways of viewing the voluminous self-disclosure literature.

The Reinforcement Paradigm

Let us now consider what social psychologists know about the next three components of interpersonal attraction: *the value of resources exchanged; the variability of resources exchanged;* and *the substitutability of resources.*

It is the reinforcement paradigm (Kuhn, 1962) that has dominated research into the antecedents of interpersonal attraction (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Byrne, 1971; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).[2] Psychologists take it for granted that intimates seek out those relationships that are re-

Of course, the reason that the reinforcement paradigm has continued to dominate social psychological theories of interpersonal attraction is that it works.

warding; and avoid those that are punishing. In *Interpersonal Attraction*, Berscheid and Walster (1978) review the voluminous research documenting that people do end up liking those who reward them or are even associated with reward, and disliking those who punish them or who are even associated with punishment.

Recently, social psychologists have tried to extend the simple reinforcement models to explain more complicated exchanges. (See, for example, Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Ekeh, 1974; Homans, 1974; Walster & Walster, 1977.) For example, Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, and Hay (1982) recently tried to extend equity theory, a model of social exchange, to explain love and family relations.

The Equity Formulation

Equity theory is a strikingly simple theory. It is composed of four interlocking propositions:

Proposition I: Individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equal rewards minus punishments).

Proposition II: Groups (or rather the individuals comprising these groups) can maximize collective reward by evolving accepted systems for equitably apportioning resources among members. Thus, groups will evolve such systems of equity, and will attempt to induce members to accept and adhere to these systems.

Proposition II: Groups will generally reward members who treat others equitably, and generally punish members who treat others inequitably.

Proposition III: When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they will become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress they will feel.

Proposition IV: Individuals who discover they are in inequitable relationships will attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity. The greater the inequity that exists, the more distress they will feel, and the harder they will try to restore equity (Hatfield, Utne, & Traupmann, 1979, p. 101).

The Theorists' Debate

Theorists are in sharp debate as to whether or not considerations of fairness should or should not be, are or are not important in love relations.

1. *Theorists who believe fairness should or does not matter in love relations.* Fromm (1956) is probably the most well known proponent of the notion that true love goes beyond exchange. In *The Art of Loving*, he grants that

most flawed "human love relations follow the same pattern of exchange which governs the commodity and labor market" (p. 3). But, he contends, unconditional love—love given without expectation or desire for anything in return—is the truest, strongest, and best type of love. Rubin (1973), too, argues that romantic relations are special relations:

> The principles of the interpersonal marketplace are most likely to prevail in encounters between strangers and casual acquaintances and in the early stages of the development of relationships. As an interpersonal bond becomes more firmly established, however, it begins to go beyond exchange. In close relationships one becomes increasingly concerned with what he can get from the other person and increasingly concerned with what he can do for the other. (pp. 86–87)

A number of other theorists agree with the contention that love transcends equity. (See, for example, Douvan, 1977; May, 1953; Mills, 1975; Murstein, 1977.)

2. *An equally prominent group of theorists insists that equity considerations do apply in intimate relationships.* For example, Lederer and Jackson (1968) observe:

> Marriage is an interlocking, self-contained system. The behavior and the attitudes of one partner *always* stimulate some sort of reaction from the other. . . . We call this system of behavioral responses the quid pro quo (or "something for something"). . . . The quid pro quo process is an unconscious effort of both partners to assure themselves that they are equals, that they are peers. It is a technique enabling each to preserve his dignity and self-esteem. Their equality may not be apparent to the world at large; it may be based upon values meaningless to anyone else, yet serve to maintain the relationship because the people involved perceive their behavioral balance as fair and mutually satisfying. (pp. 177–179)

Patterson (1971) adds:

> There is an odd kind of equity which holds when people interact with each other. In effect, we get what we give, both in amount and in kind. Each of us is moved to promise his own bookkeeping system for love, and for pain. Over time, the books are balanced. (p. 26)

Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) and Hatfield, Traupmann, Sprecher, Utne, and Hay (1982) argue that the equity principles, which operate so relentlessly in casual relations, operate in intimate relations as well. They agree that casual and intimate relationships differ in a

Even this champion of unconditional love, however, inadvertently finds himself in the equity camp. Although Fromm claims that equity considerations demean love relations, he is moved to promise his readers that if they love truly they will reap a handsome return. "[In] truly giving, he cannot help receiving that which is given back to him. Giving implies to make the other a giver also . . ." (p. 21).

number of ways. At the very least, they differ in: (1) intensity of liking/loving; (2) depth and breadth of information exchange; (3) value of the resources exchanged; (4) variety of the resources exchanged; (5) substitutability of resources; (6) commitment; and (7) the unit of analysis (from "you" and "me" to "we"). However, they insist that the fact that casual and intimate relations differ in so many important ways simply affects (a) how easy or how difficult it is to calculate equity in a casual versus an intimate relationship, and (b) how the participants in the respective relationships choose to restore equity. They insist, however, that the same equity *processes* operate in both kinds of relationships.

Other theorists agree that in love relationships—considerations of equity and the marketplace prevail (Bernard, 1972; Blau, 1964; Scanzoni, 1972; Stover, 1966).

When faced with the compelling arguments on both sides of the issue of whether intimate relationships should and do transcend or embody equity principles, there is only one thing to do—turn to the data.

The Data

Strong support for the equity theory position comes from a variety of sources (see Hatfield, *et al.*, 1982, for a review of this research). Let us consider some of the equity hypotheses that have been tested and the data that suggest that people *are* profoundly concerned with equity/inequity throughout their lives.

Hypothesis 1. According to equity theory, men and women should be most likely to continue to date, to live together and to marry if they feel their relationship is an equitable one.

Hatfield, Walster, and Traupmann (1979) interviewed 537 college men and women who were casual or steady daters. The authors measured equity via the Walster Global Measures (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). This scale asks:

> Considering what you put into your dating relationship, compared to what you get out of it . . . and what your partner puts in compared to what she/ he gets out of it, how does your dating relationship "stack up"?

From the reports of both men and women it was possible to classify them as feeling "overbenefited" ("I am getting a much better . . . somewhat better . . . or slightly better . . . deal than my partner"), "equitably" treated ("We are both getting an equally good, or bad, deal"), or "underbenefited" ("My partner is getting a slightly better . . . somewhat better . . . much better deal than I am") in their love affairs.

The authors chose to measure a relationship's potential in several ways. First, they asked couples how sexual their relationships were.

They found that couples in equitable relationships had experimented with a higher degree of sex. Generally, couples in equitable relationships were having sexual intercourse. Both the greatly underbenefited and the greatly overbenefited tended to stop before "going all the way."

The authors then asked respondents who had had intercourse, why they had gone so far. The participants in relatively equitable relations were most likely to say that they had intercourse because they *both* wanted to (i.e., to say that "mutual curiosity," the fact that "We are/were in love," "We like/liked each other," or "mutual physical desire, enjoyment" were their reasons for having intercourse). Those who felt extremely overbenefited or extremely underbenefited were less likely to say that sex was a mutual decision.

Why were men and women in equitable relationships so willing to experiment sexually? Perhaps because they were confident that their relationships would last. As predicted, the authors found that men and women in equitable relationships were generally in stable relationships—and they expected them to remain that way. They were confident that they would still be together 1 year and 5 years later. Their confidence may well have been warranted. In a follow-up study 3½ months later, couples in equitable relationships *were* more likely to be still dating than were other couples. Both the overbenefited (who had every reason to wish their relationships would last) and the underbenefited (who had every reason to hope that something better would come along) were pessimistic about the future. If their relationships were not in disarray, they expected that these relationships soon would be. (Other evidence in support of this contention comes from Traupmann, Peterson, Utne, and Hatfield, 1981).

Hypothesis 2: Men and women in equitable relationships should be fairly content. Men and women who feel they have received either far more or far less than they deserve should be uncomfortable. The more inequitable their relationships, the more distressed they should be. (See Figure 1 for a graphic depiction of this hypothesis.)

Utne, Hatfield, Greenberger, and Traupmann (in press) interviewed 118 newlywed couples. Couples varied in age from 16 to 45. (The average groom was 26+ and the average bride was 24+.) Most couples had dated seriously for over two years before marrying. For 80% of the couples, this was their first marriage. Surprisingly, almost two thirds of them had lived together before their marriage. The couples had a variety of occupations, including housewives, accountants, teachers, farmers, and construction workers; a few were students.

The interview covered a variety of topics, including the history of the relationship, perceived equity/inequity of the relationship, and Austin's (1976) measure of contentment/distress with the marriage.
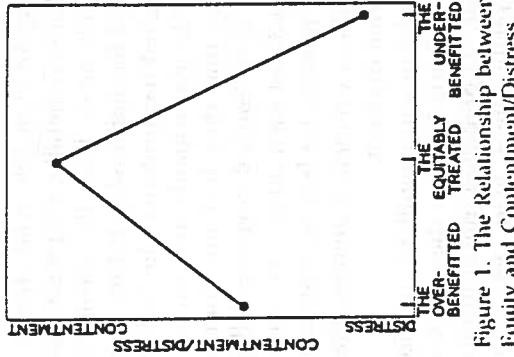
Figure 1. The Relationship between Equity and Contentment/Distress

The authors found that equity considerations did have an important impact on how contented/distressed couples felt about their relationships. As predicted, couples in equitable relationships were the most contented and happy. Newlyweds who felt they were getting more than they deserved from the relationship felt slightly ill at ease—they felt guilty about the status quo. As you might expect, the underbenefited were even more distressed—they felt angry about the status quo. There is considerable evidence that newlyweds' concern with fairness continues throughout the lifespan (Traupmann & Hatfield, in press). Evidence in support of this contention comes from Hatfield, Traupman, and Walster (1979); Hatfield, Walster, and Traupmann (1979); Traupmann and Hatfield, (1981); Utne, Hatfield, Greenberger, and Traupmann, (in press).

Hypothesis 3: Since inequities are disturbing, couples may be expected to keep chipping away at them over the course of their marriages. Thus, all things being equal, intimate relationships should become more and more equitable over time. As yet, there is no evidence as to whether or not this is so.

Hypothesis 4: In all marriages there are certain crisis periods. If we contacted couples just before such crises, in the midst of such crises, and then again, after couples had a chance to deal with crisis, we would find that the couples had found the crisis period very unsettling, and had worked hard to reestablish the equitableness of their relationships . . . or that their relationship would be floundering.

Unfortunately most of the evidence in support of the contention that mismatched couples do try to "fine-tune" their relationship is anecdotal. For example, there are some data suggesting that when people's

physical appearance changes drastically (through accident, plastic surgery, or dieting) their expectations may change too. For example, Jones (1974) warns obese clients that:

Marriage, like all relationships, has a balance. When one partner is overweight, the fact has been considered, perhaps unconsciously, in setting up the balance. Obviously, when you remove the obesity, you upset the balance. The relationship shifts and takes on a different complexion. (pp. 23-50)

In the same article, Jones quotes Palmer:

Gone are . . . the attempts to buy love through acquiescence and the overweight's traditional don't-make-waves-they-may-throw-your-out policy. In their place comes a new pride, as awareness of rights and a tendency to speak up for those rights. (pp. 23-50)

There is a limited amount of survey data that support the contention that any change in the equity of a relationship sends reverberations throughout the entire system (e.g., Komarovsky, 1971).

Hypothesis 5: Equitable relationships will be especially stable relationships.

Utne et al. (in press) interviewed newlyweds about their marriages. The authors measured newlyweds' perceptions of how overbenefited, equitably treated, or underbenefited they were in their marriages, as well as how stable they believed their marriages to be. The authors proposed that spouses who feel equitably treated will perceive their marriages to be more stable than will spouses who feel underbenefited or overbenefited. The authors measured perceived stability in marriage by asking their respondents: (1) how certain they were that the two of them would be together in four years; (2) how often they had considered moving out; (3) how often they had considered divorce; and (4) how stable they felt their marriage was. As predicted, the more inequitable the relationship, the more newlyweds thought about the possibility of abandoning the relationship. Men and women who felt equitably treated in their relationships were more secure about their marriages than were either the overbenefited or the underbenefited. Additional support for this contention comes from Hatfield, Traupmann, and Walster (1979).

The preceding material provides compelling evidence that, throughout the lifespan, intimates are deeply concerned with the equity/inequity of their relationships.

The Family Therapy Perspective I

Thus far, the reinforcement paradigm—and equity theory—have guided much of the research on intimate relations. What does the family

therapy perspective have to add to this research? My work as a family therapist convinces me that theorists should focus on some of the following issues:

1. *Casuals and intimates care about very different things.* Casuals generally care about quite practical inputs and outcomes—services, money, goods, and so forth. Generally, what lovers care about is love. Of course, they *also* care about the same practical issues that concern casuals. (See Kelley, 1979, for an excellent discussion of this point.)

Often therapists who use behavior modification techniques fail to recognize that love is a legitimate concern of intimates. When their clients insist: "What I really want is for him/her to love me—to *want* to give me what I want"—therapists generally inform their client that that goal is too vague; unmanageable. "Break that down—specify *exactly* what it is that you want." The compliant clients soon come up with a list. "I want him to take out the garbage." "I want him to do the dishes." (Azrin et al., 1973; Fensterheim, 1972; Rappaport & Harrell, 1972; Weiss, Birchler, & Vincent, 1974.) Family therapists, however, would argue that the client's desire is a legitimate one—love is the essence of an interpersonal relationship. It is a reasonable thing to want. It is also a practical thing to desire. If intimates love one another, and are consistently looking out for one another's best interests, each of them can count on getting the best. No wonder clients insist on love, and are reluctant to settle for a few concrete goals (Kelley, 1979).

Researchers have also tended to overlook the obvious. More research needs to be done on how love-filled exchanges differ from loveless ones—even when both are technically "equitable."

2. *Casuals and intimates differ in their certainty as to whether or not they should be concerned with fairness.* Most people tend to feel it is appropriate to care "What's in it for me?" and "Am I giving as good as I can get?" in their casual relationships. However, these same people are ambivalent as to whether or not fairness should "count" in love relations (Kennedy, 1980; Mills & Clark, 1980; Murstein, 1980; Rubin, 1973; Wexler, in press). In part, intimates long to love and be loved for "themselves." In Of Lust and Love, Reik (1957) observed:

In the deepest sense, we wish to be loved as we were once by our mother. This demand is as tenacious as it is unreasonable and unrealizable. We cannot be loved in this way any more than a mother's love can be replaced by another's. A man once asked his mistress if she should love him if he suddenly became poor. "Of course," she answered. Then he asked her if she would love him if he became crippled by an accident. This question, too, was answered in the affirmative, but still the man was not satisfied. He tried again, and asked her if her affection would remain the same if, in addition to these handicaps, he were to become deaf, blind, and insane. The woman finally became impatient and said, "Why in the world should I love an

impoverished, deaf, blind, and crippled idiot? Exactly—why should she? Only a mother could love her child in spite of everything. (p. 110)

Nonetheless, in part, people long to love and be loved unconditionally; they marry "for better or for worse."

Yet intimates are ambivalent. In part, they feel that if their partners really loved them (and vice versa) they would *want* to treat one another fairly. Intimates generally feel uneasy with and suspicious of relationships that seem markedly inequitable. They are suspicious of the "martyr" who insists on giving and giving, refusing to accept anything in return. They are even more angry about a "parasite" who refuses to give anything in return.

3. *Casuals' exchanges generally seem reasonably straightforward. Intimate exchanges are complex, convoluted, murky.* Social psychologists have tended to write as it people are inevitably rational, straightforward, consistent. Family therapists know they are not. They know full well that people are multifaceted, complex, and inconsistent. Intimates need to be loved and needed, but they want to be left alone; they want a partner they can idealize, but someone who's no better than they are. They want to be intimate with someone, but panic when intimacy threatens.

Casuals have only limited time: They tend to stick with conventional patterns of exchange. Intimates grow up with one another. They have time to evolve an enormously complex family system of reciprocal give and take. Family therapists such as Bateson (1972), Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark (1973), Napier and Whitaker (1978), Watslawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974) provide excellent analyses of the complex patterns that families may work out in a desperate attempt to maximize their rewards, or at least minimize their suffering. An example:

Sometimes a couple enters therapy, convinced that their marriage is perfect. Their only problem is with their wild and unmanageable child. Observation of the family in action suggests that, in fact, the family is engaged in a delicate ballet. Anytime the couple begin to even touch on their potentially explosive marital problems, tension mounts. Everyone's discomfort rises. Eventually, the child, sensing trouble, frightened, begins to act up. The parents' tension immediately drops. This is something they feel a lot more comfortable dealing with. They turn to their child, and with a mixture of anger and relief, begin to concentrate on *him*. Generally, the child is equally relieved.

When social psychologists describe intimates' exchanges, they write as if intimates' exchanges were conscious and, straightforward ("I'll take out the garbage if you do the dishes") (Mills & Clark, 1980; Murstein, 1980). Family therapists are aware that love relationships are far more complicated than that.

4. *Is exploitation possible or impossible?* My experience as a family therapist alerts me to one final issue: Does exploitation exist in the family? If so, under what conditions?

Family therapists tend to be skeptical that anyone is ever a martyr. When they encounter clients who recite a lifetime of abuse, they take it for granted that the clients are getting something out of that behavior. If it is not rewarding, it will not persist. More traditional therapists usually agree. They cite the "secondary gains" of seemingly unexplicable behavior. Similarly, when family therapists encounter the family "tyrant" or "spoiled brat"—someone everyone agrees exploits all those around him—they take it for granted that the rest of the family is working hard to keep them in that position. They look for what *everyone* is getting out of these "seemingly unbalanced relationships."

The Marxists, on the other hand, take quite a different view. Kennedy (1980) and Wexler (in press) take it for granted that injustice exists. How can love relations be fair when the social context in which they exist is unfair (Sampson, 1968). How can women, for example, demand equal respect in the family when women have less power than men in the world as a whole?

This fascinating question—as to when, if ever, there is blatant exploitation in love relations—is one that social psychologists would do well to explore. (See Kelley, 1979.)

Commitment—Casual or Intimate

Let us return to the review of what social psychologists know about the last two components of intimacy.

Commitment (i.e., Length of Relationship)

Casual relationships are usually short-term. Intimate relationships are expected to endure, and generally do endure, over a long period of time. For example, husband-wife relationships and parent-child relationships are considered the most enduring of all relationships. "'Til death do us part" is still our cultural ideal for marriage. Social psychologists such as Brehm and Cohen (1962) have documented the critical importance of commitment in determining how people perceive one another and how hard they'll try to keep a relationship going.

The Unit of Analysis—from "You" and "Me" to "We"

Casuals think of themselves as individuals. Hatfield, Traupmann and Walster (1979) point out that intimates—through identification with and empathy for their partners—come to define themselves as a unit, as a couple. They see themselves not merely as individuals, interacting with others, but also as a partnership, interacting with other individuals,

partnerships, and groups. (A number of psychologists have explored this process, as Boulding, 1973; Blau, 1964.)

The Family Therapy Perspective II

Social psychologists have written as if acquaintances move gradually from "you" and "one" to "we." Family therapists would point out that the transition is not so smooth as that. Family therapists would argue: (1) Everyone feels an intense conflict between the desire to be free and independent versus the desire to merge with others; and (2) there are probably pronounced sex differences in how comfortable people are with individuality *versus* intimacy.

According to many theorists, one of the major tasks facing every adult is the achievement of a separate identity while, at the same time, achieving a deeply intimate relationship with others (Erickson, 1968; Freud, 1922; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Kaplan, 1978; Maslow, 1954). Kaplan suggests that adults spend much of their lives resolving the dilemma between achieving a sense-of-self, while at the same time establishing close nurturant relations with others.

According to family therapists, men have the easiest time achieving an independent identity; women have the easiest time achieving closeness with others.

Family therapists such as Napier (1977) describe two types of people—Type I and Type II—who seem, with uncanny accuracy, to attract one another. Type I (usually a woman) is only minimally concerned with maintaining her independence. What she cares about is achieving emotional closeness. She seeks "fusion with the partner," "oneness," "we-ness," in the marriage; she puts a lot of energy into planning "togetherness" activities. What Type I fears is rejection and abandonment. She feels rejected when the partner chooses to spend an evening alone, or with other friends. (This feeling of rejection may even extend to times when Type I's partner is engaged in necessarily exclusive activities such as earning an income, studying for exams, writing a manuscript.)

Type I's partner, Type II (usually a man) is most concerned with maintaining his sense of self and personal freedom and autonomy. He feels a strong need to establish his territory within the common household—to have "my study," "my workshop," "my car." Similarly, he feels compelled to draw sharp lines around psychological space—"my night out," "my career," "my way of handling problems." What he fears is being "suffocated," "stifled," "engulfed," or in some manner intruded on by the spouse.

Napier observes that the man and woman's efforts to reduce their anxieties make matters worse. The woman—seeking more closeness—clasps tightly at her mate, thereby contributing to his anxiety. The man—seeking more distance—retreats further, which increases his wife's panic, inducing further "clasping."

Other theorists provide support for Napier's contention that there are gender differences in independence/intimacy. For example, sociobiologists such as Hagen (1979) Symons (1978) and Wilson (1976), argue that men are genetically programmed to desire anonymous, impersonal, casual sex, and women are programmed to desire one, deeply intimate, secure relationship. Other theorists agree that men and women desire very different things from intimate relationships, but they insist that these gender differences are *learned* (Bernard, 1972; Byrne & Byrne, 1977; Firestone, 1970; Griffitt & Hatfield, in press; Hatfield *et al.*, 1982; Tavris and Offir, 1977; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977; Walster & Walster, 1978.)

Family therapists, then, would argue that the move from "you" and "me" to "we" is far more difficult than social psychologists have assumed.

Summary

We began by defining passionate love, companionate love, and intimacy, and reviewed the seven components of intimacy: (1) intensity of feelings; (2) self-disclosure; (3) value of resources exchanged; (4) variety of resources exchanged; (5) substitutability of resources; (6) commitment; and (7) the conversion of "you" and "me" to "we."

Next we considered each of the components of intimacy one at a time. First, we reviewed what social psychologists know about each of these components of intimacy. (In the last 20 years, social psychologists have gained an enormous amount of knowledge about intimacy.) Then we suggested how family therapists might interpret the existing data, and what research family therapists would suggest for the future.

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