The Role of Self-Esteem, Attachment Style, and Social Interest in Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction

Samuel W. Root

Adler Graduate School
Abstract

An individual’s potential for perceiving satisfaction in love depends on a complex array of factors. Amidst the many process and outcome variables, the author sorts through a series of significant factors, ultimately weaving together a relationship-success forecasting model. The author begins his review with a discussion of the social-cognitive literature as it defines the self as socially constructed and embedded. After giving examples of past behavioral prediction models, the author narrows his focus on two frameworks (self-esteem’s sociometer and adult attachment style) with which one may integrate and understand the conditions that are associated with establishing and maintaining love satisfaction. The review culminates with a consideration of Alfred Adler’s social interest in predicting love satisfaction. Social interest will be disassembled in terms of the following five construct-categories: age and gender, cooperation, altruism, well-being and stress, and self-actualization.
Acknowledgments

To my past and present teachers, “thank you.” I have been and will continue to be inspired by your guidance, patience, and enthusiasm. To my father, Gregory, for your unconditional encouragement and love, and for your dazzling intelligence and social grace; to my mother, Sylvia, for your hard work and example as a community leader and activist; to my older brother Daniel for your kindness, generosity, and for your choosing of an entirely different field of study; and to my girlfriend and fellow-adventurer, Amanda: Your very way of being continues to challenge me to practice what I preach (not to mention all of our fun together). Also, thanks to my step-family: Douglas, Elliot, and Peter Olney. I also wish to thank my professional teachers: Dr. Joel Samaha and Dr. Marti H. Gonzales from the University of Minnesota; and, Dr. Dan Haugen, Dr. Herb Laube, Dr. Roger Ballou, Sue Brokaw, Catherine Hedberg, Jeff Lupient, Chris Hegelstad, Dr. Mike Miller, Tina Feigal, Dr. Marina Bluvshtein, Mary Dahnert, Stacie Bigelow, Jere Truer, Trish Anderson, Margie McGovern, Ev Hass, and Earl Heinrich from the Adler Graduate School. Also, I send thanks to my ICASSI 2006 teachers including Dr. Roy Kern, Dr. Paul Peluso, and Dr. Paul Rasmussen. Thanks to Dr. James Bitter and Dr. Bill Nicholl, too, for your challenging London 2006 ATI program, and to Maria Wasielewski for your Athens 2006 ATI program. In conclusion, I would like to thank Dr. Harold Mosak, Dr. Wayne Dyer, Ram Daas, Tom Farrell, Marvin Plakut, and Rodney Yee. Finally, thank you, Dr. Alfred Adler, for illuminating the “useful” way and for reconnecting me with my European “roots.”
Table of Contents

1 Abstract 2

2 Acknowledgments 3

3 Introduction 7

4 Social-Cognition and Predicting Processes: The Relational Self 8
   The Self in Relationship: Schemas and Prophecies 8
   Relational schemas: Models, maps, and misperceptions 8
   Evidence: Prophecies, sensitivities, reflected appraisals, and self-doubt 9
   Deep networks 10
   The Self in Relationship: Predicting Processes 10
   The Self in Love 11
   Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction 11

5 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Self-esteem and Attachment Style 12
   Self-esteem and Love Relationship Satisfaction 12
   The relationally contingent SE 12
   Interpersonal appraisals and SE-thresholds 13
   SE, PPR (revisited), and LRS 13
   Evidence: Feeling understood 13
   Evidence: Self-perceptions 13
   Evidence: Acceptance threats 14
   Evidence: Felt security, self-doubt, and rejection sensitivity 14
   SE, moods, and LRS 14
   Evidence: Mood-improvement motivation 15
   Evidence: Negative moods and PPR 15
   Attachment and Love Relationship Satisfaction: Attachment Style as Predictor 15
   Attachment concepts 16
   Evidence: Love as attachment 16
   Evidence: Working models 17
   Evidence: Rejection sensitivity 18
   Evidence: Task stress 18
   Evidence: Support and caregiving 19
   Evidence: Romantic interaction 19

6 Social Interest 20
   Theoretical Definition 20
   Operational Definition 20
   Social Interest and Love: Theory versus Statistics 21

7 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Direct Correlates of Social Interest 22
Direct Variable Relationships 22
   Marital adjustment 22
   Couples adjustment 23

8 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Indirect Correlates of Social Interest 23
   Age, Gender, and Social Interest 23
      Age 23
      Gender 24
   Cooperation and Social Interest 24
      Cooperation as task-success predictor 24
      Cooperation, altruism, and empathy 25
   Altruism and Social Interest 25
      Concept definition 25
      Trait versus state 25
      Similar to SI 26
      Evidence: Altruism and marital adjustment 26
      Evidence: Altruism and situationality 26
      Evidence: Adjustment and situationality 27
   Well-being and Social Interest 28
      Concept definition 28
      Stress and SI 29
      Evidence: Affectual stress 29
      Evidence: Noise stress 30
      Evidence: Time, memory, and food aversion (adjustment and stress) 30
      Cognitive and affective well-being and SI 31
      Evidence: Well-being measures and life tasks 31
   Self-Actualization and Social Interest 32
      Evidence: Self-actualization, locus of control, and SI 32
      Meta-evidence: Optimum health, SI, and LRS 32
   Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Social Interest: Summary 33

9 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Methodology 33
   Study Designs 34
      Self-report 34
      Longitudinal 34
      Other designs 35
   Measures Used 35
   Variables Defined 35

10 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Limitations 36
   Young, Caucasian Subjects 36
   Alternate Explanations 36
   Small Sample Size 37

11 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Implications 37
Self-esteem and Love Relationship Satisfaction 38
Attachment Style and Love Relationship Satisfaction 39
Social Interest and Love Relationship Satisfaction 40
  Age and gender 40
  Cooperation 41
  Altruism 41
  Well-being 42
  Self-actualization 43

12 Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Future Research 43
Self-esteem, Attachment Style, and Social Interest 44
Social Interest 45

13 Discussion 46

14 Conclusion 47

15 References 49
The Role of Self-Esteem, Attachment Style, and Social Interest in Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction

Introduction

In Europe and North America today, marriage rates are down, while rates of divorce are up. In 2005, while the USA and Canada’s divorce rate hovered at 46 and 48 percent, the Russian Federation census showed an inflated 77 percent (www.unece.org/stats/trends2005/map_c.htm). Given the negative impact of divorce on both individual and family systems (Eirik, 2001), the public and scientific communities at home and abroad demonstrate interest in this widespread and significant trend. While various camps disentangle the conditions that appear to coincide with its occurrence, data from social science camps have particular influential power with public policy makers who aim to remedy our basic social problems, including divorce (Campbell, 1976).

Similar to Huxley’s (1962) observation surrounding his vision of the optimally functioning community, “Public health and social reform are the indispensable preconditions of any kind of general enlightenment” (p. 190), we envision the basic purpose of today’s review as one of enlightenment and consciousness-raising. If we can inform the reader about how to mindfully navigate the, at times, confusing map of love relationships, our job will be half complete. Second, here will be an attempt to understand more of the nature of love-relationship systems. In addition to painting a picture of the ideal love relationship, learning about its components enables us to precisely define what we ought to study in future studies of love.

In today’s literature review, to which we now turn our attention, we initially present two frameworks in which to hang concepts and integrate past research findings. We will conclude,
however, by focusing on one complex, variable-framework, social interest (SI), and empirically demonstrate its impact on and ability to predict love relationship satisfaction (LRS).

Literature Review

Social-Cognition and Predicting Processes: The Relational Self

The Self in Relationship: Schemas and Prophecies

Within the last three decades, social-cognitive researchers have attempted to explain the development of the self in the social context. While each of the person perception, self perception, and situation perception approaches demonstrate how people think and behave in their interactions, an integrated model of social cognition has yet to be formulated (Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin, 1996). In general, the contributions from social-cognitive literature on close relationships, symbolic interactionism, object relations, and other interpersonal theories have built a body of knowledge that stresses the importance of interpersonal feedback in defining the sense of self (Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979).

Relational schemas: Models, maps, and misperceptions. In an attempt to account for the similarities amongst the various social-cognitive approaches, and, to establish a framework for the production of specific research predictions, Baldwin (1992) proposed the idea of the relational schema. As a cognitive structure or associative network (Baldwin, 1996) accounting for how individuals behave with others in the social context, the relational schema includes a self-schema (or cognitive model), other schema, and an interpersonal script for the interactional pattern (Baldwin, 1992).

Relational schemas are said to contain representational worlds, or cognitive maps, which individuals use to navigate their relational worlds (Baldwin, 1992). According to this model, different relational contexts are tied with different self-concepts; in addition, based on prior
interpersonal experiences, relational contexts are paired with specific sets of expectations, and, at times, contain over-learned and dysfunctional contingency associations (Baldwin, 1996). Finally, relational schemas contain both affective and motivational components which aid in the use of the individual’s cognitive map (Baldwin, 1992).

Recent studies have demonstrated that individuals’ expectations influence how they interpret social situations in a self-schema, biased fashion (Baldwin, 1992). Moreover, subjects have tended to behave in ways that produced responses in others that both confirmed their interpersonal expectations and reinforced their relational schemas.

*Evidence: Prophecies, sensitivities, reflected appraisals, and self-doubt.* Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri (1998) collected both longitudinal and laboratory study data from couples in order to test the *self-fulfilling prophecy* in love relationships. The combined results indicated that relationships involving high rejection-sensitive (HRS) partners were more likely to end than were relationships involving low rejection-sensitive (LRS) partners.

In a variation of the self-fulfilling prophecy, Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, & Ellsworth (1998) tested the effect of *reflected appraisals* (e.g., *perceived partner regard* (PPR) and *acceptance*). Data from four experiments indicated that while subjects with lower self-esteem (SE) tended to doubt their partners’ regard for them after feeling personally threatened, those with higher SE’s became more confident in their partners’ regard following the same threatening conditions; i.e., high-SE subjects appeared to use their relationships as bases for *self-affirmation*. Similarly, Murray, Bellavia, Feeney, Holmes, & Rose (2001a) found their low-SE subjects to underestimate themselves and their relationships, apparently linking task-failure with interpersonal rejection and task-completion with interpersonal success.
Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose (2001b) again studied the impact of self-doubt and further illustrated the role of negative self-models leading to unsatisfying love relationships. Results from both dating and married couples showed that those subjects with self-doubt consistently underestimated their partners’ love for them, which in turn had the effect of contaminating the quality of their love relationships. Conversely, subjects who more accurately perceived their partners’ regard for them, i.e. doubted themselves less, were more likely to feel secure and risk greater interdependence.


The Self in Relationship: Predicting Processes

In the context of summarizing the history of his attraction paradigm, Byrne (1997) discussed the roles and goals of behavioral science. When the researcher’s goal is behavioral prediction, he argued, his or her role also includes the establishment of operationally and conceptually consistent investigation models (p. 418). Examples include: Lester, Hvezda, & Sullivan’s (1983) test of Maslow’s model of mental health in which they found that basic need-satisfaction predicted mental health; Feeney and Noller (1990) administered a 16-measure questionnaire to a large sample of students and found that attachment style predicted relationship length, fulfilled hopes, and love relationship success; Russell and Wells (1994) examined a sample of 1207 married couples, and out of 17 potential predictors of happiness, the researchers discovered quality of marriage as the most significant variable, accounting for between 45 and 51 percent (p. 316) of the total happiness variance; and, testing samples of married and dating
partners, Smith, Becker, Byrne, and Przybyla (1993) conducted a study whose results indicated sexual-attitude similarity predicted both attraction and marital satisfaction, corroborating the findings of Byrne’s (1997) long-supported attraction paradigm.

*The Self in Love*

Hendrick and Hendrick (1989) evaluated the five-major theories of love used in current love relationship research. The authors’ purpose was to empirically compare and possibly integrate the different theories and measurement tools into a single, coherent framework. The authors argued that, first and foremost, theoretical concepts must be reliably measurable; thus they searched for each theory’s operational and theoretical consistency (see above, Byrne, 1997).

Three-hundred and ninety-one college-aged subjects were asked to hold a picture of either their current or their most recent romantic partner in mind while completing a variety of measures including the *relationship rating form* (RRF), the *passionate love scale* (PLS), an attachment style inventory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), the *triangular theory of love scale* (TTLS, Sternberg, 1986; Sternberg, 1997), and the *love attitudes scale* (LAS, Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986). Results indicated interrelationships between the various love subscales. Also, while some were multi-themed, others scales were factorially less-complex. Analysis produced five distinct factors common among the scales: themes of love and passion, closeness, secure attachment, practicality, and ambivalence. The authors concluded that while they still could not offer an overarching theory of love, the field was moving toward a more complete understanding of the complexities and context-dependencies of factors such as personality, attitudes, and beliefs.

*Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction*

Predicting an interpersonal process is a significant challenge, as any behavior which involves subliminal evaluation and affect (e.g., attraction, dating, love, and marriage) involves a
multitude of interactive constructs (Feeney, 2002; Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998). In an attempt to deal with the complex, human-attraction process, Byrne (1997) developed a behavior sequence model which relates external events with internal mediating processes and predicts observable, behavioral outcomes (p. 428). While Byrne’s model attempted to explain a larger set of phenomena, our model is essentially related in terms of its predictive intentions.

Love relationship satisfaction (LRS) is a complex process and outcome-aspect of intimate adult relationships (Hendrick, 1988; Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Meeks et al., 1998). Generally, the degree to which an individual experiences LRS seems to depend on how he or she thinks their partner “sees” them (e.g., Murray et al., 2001a).

Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Self-esteem and Attachment Style

Self-esteem and Love Relationship Satisfaction

Empirical studies have demonstrated numerous correlative-relationships between the SE and LRS variables (e.g., Hendrick et al., 1988; Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Murray et al., 1998). Its usefulness as a framework for LRS investigations has been demonstrated on a number of different levels and in unique contexts (for a review, see Baumeister & Leary, 2000).

The relationally contingent SE. The so-called sociometer hypothesis directly implicated SE and LRS as interrelated. Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs’ (1995) investigation, while establishing this unique theory of SE, demonstrated that subjects’ public behavior had a more significant impact on their state and trait-SE levels than did their private behavior, i.e., subjects were more likely to behave in ways that appeared to be fitted to enhance or protect their SE’s when their esteem threats were public rather than private. Overall, SE-protective movements seemed to detract from LRS and happiness.
Interpersonal appraisals and SE-thresholds. Leary et al. (1998) set out with the goal of measuring the impact of individuals’ perceptions of others’ reactions to them on their individual SE’s. Study one and two indicated subjects’ SE’s were most responsive to others’ evaluations that were moderate (i.e., ambiguous) in valence. The last three studies showed that individuals with lower trait-SE felt excluded more quickly (“chronic inclusion deficit’’); though once perceiving interpersonal exclusion, low and high-SE subjects responded to the negative feedback in essentially the same way.

SE, PPR (revisited), and LRS. Perceived partner regard (PPR) (see above, self-fulfilling prophecies) appears to play a unique role in predicting LRS (for a review, see Murray, Rose, Holmes, Derrick, Podchaski, Bellavia, & Griffin, 2005). Prior studies had shown PPR to almost entirely mediate the link between SE and LRS (e.g., Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Pivotal to the PPR construct, reflected appraisals (see above) are believed to partly determine an individual’s sense of felt security in the relationship.

Evidence: Feeling understood. Murray et al.’s (2000) study tested the effects of feeling understood by an intimate other and shed light on the question of how PPR affects the process of attaching to a romantic partner. The results of the study’s cross-sectional portion indicated that low-SE versus high-SE subjects: found less value to their relationships; expressed less positive perceptions of their partners; greatly underestimated their partners’ positive evaluations of them; and regarded their partners less, doubting their partners’ regards for them.

Evidence: Self-perceptions. Murray et al. (2005) tested the dyadic perspective on felt security. While taking into account the other partner’s perception, to what extent would induced-instances of felt acceptance shape an individual’s SE and LRS? Utilizing an ambitious study design, the researchers’ initial, correlational data (study one), reflected that subjects with low SE
generally felt inferior to their partners. Pointing to new self-strengths or their partners’ weaknesses appeared to lessen the low-SE subjects’ doubts about their partners’ regards for them, and even alleviated some of their more general interpersonal anxieties.

Evidence: Acceptance threats. Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, and Kusche (2002), collecting measures of SE, PPR, actual partner regard, optimism, closeness, mood, and unconditional regard, conducted three experiments with the intention of clarifying the dynamics of the love relationship attachment process. Three experimental conditions activated threats to: belongingness; acceptance; and, acceptance, again, though this time with the subject’s actual dating partner present. The results indicated that subjects with low SE: reacted to acceptance threats with diminished feelings of acceptance; tarnished impressions of their partners and partners’ regards; and heightened feelings of self-doubt. Following the same conditions of threat, conversely, high-SE subjects responded with more positive impressions of their partners than did their high-SE, control-condition, subject-counterparts.

Evidence: Felt security, self-doubt, and rejection sensitivity. Murray, Griffin, Rose, and Bellavia (2003) began their study arguing that felt security significantly defined individuals’ chronic perceptions of their partners’ regards and ultimately determined the potential of their relationships to function as either sources of self-affirmation or as sources of self-doubt. Results from their longitudinal, daily diary study, and a 12-month follow-up indicated that low-SE subjects versus high SE’s generally felt: less regard for the partners and felt less well-regarded by them; more feelings of self-doubt; and, more sensitive to rejection. Together, these three results broadly defined outcomes that lead to declines in LRS.

SE, moods, and LRS. Heimpel, Wood, Marshall, and Brown (2002) structured their investigation with the belief that a broader understanding of SE would be developed by
clarifying the mood-regulating processes of low and high-SE subjects. The authors’ mixed-study design results found evidence for differences in the motivation to repair moods: while low and high-SE subjects did not differ in knowledge of mood repair strategies and reported the same options available to them to repair their moods, low SE’s were less likely to express goals to improve their moods than were high SE’s. Also, a laboratory experiment involving a mood-induction procedure demonstrated that low and high SE’s did not differ in their expectations about what would alleviate their negative moods. Studies four and five indicated that low SE versus high SE’s were: less likely to express motivations to repair moods; more familiar and accepting of negative moods; less likely to believe negative moods depleted their energy; and, less likely to try to improve their moods.

Evidence: Negative moods and PPR. Bellavia and Murray (2003), also linking moods with SE, studied subjects’ reactions to their partners’ negative moods. The main analysis revealed that low-SE subjects versus high SE’s felt: more responsible for their partners’ ambiguously caused negative moods; more unloved and rejected in the same condition, as well as in the non-ambiguous mood and positive mood and non-ambiguous conditions; and, more hostile and rejected in each condition, this resulting in additional negative feelings about their partners. Mediational analyses revealed that SE significantly predicted perceived responsibility for partners’ moods, both positive and negative; and, perceived responsibility predicted subjects’ feelings of rejection. Conversely, the direct path linking SE to feelings of rejection was insignificant.

Attachment and Love Relationship Satisfaction: Attachment Style as Predictor

In 1994, Hazan and Shaver presented a thorough review of intimate relationships through the theoretical and empirical lenses of adult attachment theory. The authors argued that an
overarching theory of love relationships is both desirable and achievable, and that attachment theory operates well as an organizational framework for studies of LRS.

Attachment concepts. Individuals’ relational guidance systems seem to contain interaction-scripts (see above) from which individuals subliminally “read” their lines, understand and “act out” their respective roles, and behave in ways that reflect their internalized working models (Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Moreover, individuals’ working models seem to contain beliefs which help them to forecast other individuals’ movements, availabilities, and responsiveness, especially in the realm of close relationships.

Attachment theory describes individuals’ behavior in terms of interpersonal expectations, and appears useful as a framework for studying love relationships from a number of perspectives including: Love’s multiple forms appear shaped by social experiences that produce different relationship styles; unhealthy and healthy styles appear as reasonable adaptations to social circumstances; separation and loss are related to loneliness and love; and, attachment makes sense from an evolutionary perspective in terms of the greater socio-emotional processes evident in both children and nonhuman primates (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

An individual’s attachment style develops according to two factors: the felt availability and accessibility of his or her primary caregivers and the felt responsiveness of these primary caregivers (also, learned expectations persist into adulthood, relatively unchanged). Also, adult attachment style appears to manifest as a product of the felt accessibility and responsiveness of original caregivers; and, this meta-perception has been found to be a fairly accurate reflection of the actual experiences the individual had during his or her childhood (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Evidence: Love as attachment. In 1987, researchers Hazan and Shaver conceptualized love as an attachment process. Putting it to the empirical test, the authors ran a newspaper
questionnaire study (a diverse, 621-subject pool) in conjunction with a class exercise involving 108 college-aged subjects, and produced results indicating: a similar attachment-style frequency in adulthood as childhood; unique and predictable constellations of emotions accompanied each of the three attachment styles, secure, anxious-ambivalent, and avoidant; working models of self and others were related to attachment style; and, relationships with parents were reported through the lens of infant-mother interactions. Overall, the authors found initial support for attachment style as useful for predicting LRS.

Researchers Feeney and Noller (1990) also found empirical evidence for the application of attachment style to love and satisfaction. Three-hundred and seventy-four college-aged subjects completed eight questionnaires that represented a range of theoretical perspectives. Results were as hypothesized: Securely attached subjects disclosed relatively happy childhood relationships; avoidant subjects reported feelings of mistrust and childhood separations; and, anxious-ambivalent subjects reported desire for deep commitments in relationships and lack of independence.

Evidence: Working models. Kobak and Hazan (1991) set out to investigate the role of working models in marital adjustment and functioning. Forty couples completed various measures of attachment style, security, and marital adjustment, and participated in two, videotaped, interaction tasks. Results indicated that partners who were able to accurately predict the nature of each other’s working models were well adjusted and relatively skilled at emotional regulation. Insecurely attached wives and husbands behaved negatively during problem solving, contributing to negative affect cycles. In the meanwhile, the working-model index developed during this study has proved valuable in predicting marital adjustment and communication.
Evidence: Rejection sensitivity. In 1996, Downey and Feldman established a reliable measure (*rejection sensitivity questionnaire*, RSQ) to gauge individuals’ anxious-expectations of rejection. The authors reported on the results of an experiment and two cross-sectional studies, the last of which incorporated longitudinal data. The authors’ guiding proposition was that RS created difficulties in love relationships through its needless, weakening effect on attachment bonds. The studies’ results indicated: High-RS subjects more regularly interpreted intentional (but false) rejection in others’ ambiguous or negative behavior than did low-RS subjects; RS predicted the extent to which subjects attributed intentional and hurtful intent on the part of their hypothesized, new romantic partners’ behaviors; and, in study four, the partners of high-RS subjects found their relationships relatively less satisfying than did partners of low-RS subjects.

Evidence: Task stress. Simpson, Rholes, and Phillips (1996) videotaped 123 college-aged couples as they discussed either a major or a minor problem in their relationships. Combined with the results of several self-report measures completed by each partner, the observational data from each taped session was scored by independent raters. Results supported several hypotheses derived from attachment theory. In the major problem condition, anxious-ambivalent (insecure) partners: demonstrated heightened stress and anxiety; reacted less positively toward their partners; reported greater hostility and anger; and, viewed their relationships and partners more negatively in terms of commitment, love, respect, and openness.

Feeney and Kirkpatrick (1996) designed an experiment to determine the impact of partner-presence on stress. After the experimenters collected psychophysiological data, subjects completed measures of attachment. Data from 35-female subjects indicated a *condition effect*: Avoidant and anxious subjects’ stress was elevated only when the partner-absent condition came
first. Results seemed to mirror the more general anxiety producing effects of separation seen in anxious-ambivalent and avoidant individuals.

**Evidence: Support and caregiving.** Collins and Feeney (2000) explored support-seeking and caregiving in intimate relationships. Using an observational study design, researchers assigned 93 college-aged couples to either support-seeking or caregiving roles and instructed them to, while being videotaped, discuss personal problems. In terms of attachment style and negotiating the social support process, results indicated that avoidance was related to ineffective support-seeking behavior, and attachment-anxiety was associated with ineffective caregiving. Anxiously attached support-seeking subjects were unlikely to demonstrate and report a direct support-seeking approach, and correlational analyses indicated their relationships as relatively less caring, supportive, and satisfying.

**Evidence: Romantic interaction.** Feeney (2002) linked attachment style and measures of relationship quality with specific relationship behaviors in order to assess whether perceptions of positive or negative spousal behavior mediated LRS. A diverse subject-pool of 193 couples completed objective, diary checklists four times over the course of a week. In addition, subjects completed felt security, attachment, satisfaction, and two relationship satisfaction measures. Results linked attachment security with relationship satisfaction: Anxiety over relationships was most predictive of LRS, and comfort with closeness was related; second, spouse behavior, related to attachment style, predicted LRS in that more frequent positive behavior and less frequent negative behavior predicted satisfaction; finally, insecure partners’ greater reactivity following negative spouse-events predicted negative behavior and LRS.
Social Interest

Alfred Adler’s *Individual Psychology* is an holistic theory of personality in which individuals are conceptualized as forever moving toward the accomplishment of their self-created goals (Adler, 1964). The well-adjusted individual behaves *cooperatively*, i.e. in *accordance* with the *common sense* needs of the *social situation*; his or her goals coalesce with those of the larger group. In contrast, the maladjusted person operates out of a more or less mistaken set of beliefs and convictions in which against-common-sense and “useless” goals manifest as problems in living (Adler, 1979).

**Theoretical Definition**

Early on, *social interest* (SI) became Adler’s criterion for mental health (Bickhard & Ford, 1991). The *yardstick* by which all movements could be judged in terms of their social usefulness and contribution-potential, SI became the *cardinal personality trait* of the mentally healthy individual and implied both an object (society) and a process (feeling) for achieving the goal (Ansbacher, 1991a). From this perspective, useless behaviors were those which contributed nothing to the good of the group and society. Moreover, useless personality traits such as selfishness and arrogance stood in direct opposition to good, responsible, and ultimately satisfying social living. Furthermore, SI was described as an in-born potential, an *innate aptitude* (Ansbacher, 1991b), its expression contingent on active training and cultivation in the early home environment.

**Operational Definition**

Researchers such as Crandall (1980), Bubenzer, Zarski, and Walter (1991), and Watkins, Jr. (1994) presented well-built theoretical and empirical rationales for the measurement of SI. More recently, Bass, Curlette, Kern, and McWilliams, Jr. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of
124 empirical studies ranging from the past 25 years worth of SI-instrument research. Cumulatively, involving almost 19-thousand subjects, the studies reflected 384 effect sizes and revealed 12 psychological dimension-themes including empathy, cooperation, social support, locus of control, spirituality, religious maturity, religious immaturity, marital adjustment, narcissism, depression, anxiety, and competition.

The authors statistically compared pairs of the five major SI-scales in use today and revealed low between-scale correlations. Considering that each instrument purported to measure the same construct, the authors found this finding troublesome. Specifically, the *Social Interest Index* (SII, Greever, Tseng, & Friedland, 1973) appeared to be the most effective instrument for measuring marital adjustment. The authors recommended that future studies wishing to utilize SI-measurement tools would do best by specifying which psychological dimensions their chosen-tool actually measured. In general, their results supported the notion of SI as a complex and broad construct.

*Social Interest and Love: Theory versus Statistics*

According to Adler, in theory and in practice, all problems in love were problems of cooperation (Adler, 1978). Just as in the other life tasks of work and friendship, less than full cooperation in the love-task would lead to a decline in overall satisfaction for both partners. For example, in marital therapy, a couple’s problems would disappear after each partner learned to truly cooperate, first through the realignment of each individual’s goals with the goals of the love relationship, and then finally through the development and expansion of each partner’s SI.

For today’s purposes, with this portion of the review, the author intends to statistically illustrate the role of SI in predicting LRS. Because SI presents as a multi-dimensional and broad construct (and because of the dearth of studies directly relating SI and LRS), the author intends
the following five SI-related variable-categories of age and gender, cooperation, altruism, well-being, and self-actualization to provide a broad-enough demonstration of its nature and import in shaping LRS.

**Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Direct Correlates of Social Interest**

A great deal of research has focused on various interpersonal relationship-components and their correlations with variables associated with SI (Leak & Gardner, 1990). The existing body of research includes articles which illustrate both direct and indirect relationships between SI and LRS. We begin by considering a few of the direct relationships.

**Direct Variable Relationships**

*Marital adjustment.* Markowski and Greenwood (1984) began their study by explicating the numerous theoretical correlations between marital adjustment and SI. While many past studies had used similar characteristics to describe both martial adjustment and SI (e.g., cooperation, adaptability, empathic understanding, positive contribution, feelings of closeness and belonging, sociability, self-actualization, well-being, maturity, altruism, and others), up until that point, no research data existed to directly confirm the relationship.

The authors’ diverse sample included 52 married couples. Each partner independently completed Spanier’s (1976) self-report Dynamic Adjustment Scale (DAS) and the Social Interest Index (SII). The DAS measured four different relationship components, including satisfaction. The SII assessed each partner’s standing in each of his or her four life tasks of self-significance, work, friendship, and love. Results supported the authors’ two main hypotheses in question: A full 19 percent of marital adjustment-variance was accounted for by SI; and, the life-task love subscale correlated most positively with adjustment. Furthermore, comparison of the SII total scores and DAS subscale-scores indicated dyadic satisfaction as the most positively correlated
with SI. Finally, gender differences emerged: Male subjects’ SI scores contributed more significantly to adjustment than did female subjects’ scores.

**Couples adjustment.** Logan, Kern, Curlette and Trad (1993) intended to shed light on the interrelationships between marital adjustment, life-style similarity, and SI. A previous study had demonstrated life-style themes as reliably measurable (for a review, see Wheeler, Kern, & Curlette, 1991). Within a research framework, empirically assessing how life-styles themes mesh in the coupling process would hopefully help to both unravel the mysteries of love relationship adjustment and to technically validate Adlerian therapists’ clinical hunches.

The authors recruited a diverse sample of 129 couples and administered packets of self-report questionnaires including a life-style measure (*Life-Style Personality Inventory*, LPI), an adjustment measure (DAS), and biographical data sheets. Results indicated the higher the couples’ cumulative SI scores, the higher the couples’ cumulative adjustment scores. Individually, however, adjustment was not shown to be dependent on similar SI levels between partners. In terms of specific life-style themes, an *exploitative* or *displaying inadequacy* theme in either partner predicted a lower adjustment score. Second, the higher the combined-SI and *conforming* theme score, the higher the adjustment score. Finally, the *similarity principle* (see above) was supported both in life-style theme-terms and demographic variable-terms (particularly education level), both significantly predicting couples’ adjustment.

**Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Indirect Correlates of Social Interest**

**Age, Gender, and Social Interest**

**Age.** In 1988, Meunier and Royce set out to test how SI might vary with age. While Adler himself did not address the topic of SI and age, other authors have speculated as to SI’s changing nature with age (Massey, 1986). The present authors defined SI as *concern and interest*
in others and used an SI-scale (Social Interest Scale, SIS) which rested on a similarly simple, construct definition. While prior authors had typically tested younger subjects, these authors surveyed adult and elderly subjects. Results based on 205 respondents (though mostly female) indicated that SI generally increased with age.

Gender. Citing statistics concerning the prevalence of young, male offenders versus the relative under-representation of young females in both prisons and mental health hospitals, Kaplan (1991) researched sex differences in SI. Based upon 568 high schoolers’ (grades 9 to 12) responses to the life-task-measuring SII and the bi-scale Sulliman Scale of Social Interest (SSSI, Sulliman, 1973), results indicated that young females scored higher than young males on three of four SI-measured components: across all four life-tasks, and cumulatively, on the SII; on the total SSSI (both subscales – concern for others and self-confidence and optimism); and significantly higher on subscale one – concern for others. However, no sex differences were found on subscale two, self-esteem.

Cooperation and Social Interest

Cooperation as task-success predictor. Kaplan (1978) began his study acknowledging cooperation as: the major theme, the most effective behavior, and the best predictor of success (as effective coping) in Adler’s life tasks, including the task of love and marriage. Hypothesizing that individuals high in SI would cooperate more than individuals low in SI, the author administered 290 high school students the SII and randomly assigned pairs of subjects to a game of cooperation called the prisoner’s dilemma game (PDG, Gallo & McClintock, 1965, as cited in Kaplan, 1978). Results indicated that pairs of high-SI subjects cooperated more and more frequently than did pairs of low-SI subjects, providing evidence for the construct validity of the SIS scale, as well as demonstrating SI to be empirically measureable.
**Cooperation, altruism, and empathy.** Similarly, Crandall and Harris (1991) tested the connection between cooperation, altruism, empathy, and SI. The authors began by arguing that the best test of a personality measure lies in its ability to predict overt behavior. Eighty five university undergraduates were individually assigned to isolated cubicles in which they were to play a game of cooperation (PDG, see above). While told they were playing against other participants of the same sex, subjects actually faced-off with the experimenter and a pre-established sequence of responses. Eight to ten-weeks following the cooperation study, 24 of those 85 subjects were contacted and asked to volunteer for a local agency. In addition to this, measures of SI and empathy were related with a past study survey of 60 respondents. Results indicated: The higher the respondent’s SI, the higher the number of cooperative moves; low SI-respondents progressively worsened in the second round of trials, versus no effect for high SI’s; volunteers scored significantly higher on SI than did non-volunteers; and, SI correlated significantly with empathy.

**Altruism and Social Interest**

**Concept definition.** Krebs (1970) conducted an examination and review of the concept of altruism. Altruism was described as a central goal of socialization, an important personality trait, and an aspect of general human behavior whose study will continue to shed light on various psychological theories. In defining altruism, researchers have generally used every day definitions including elements such as an act that: (a) is not intended for gain; (b) happens spontaneously and freely; and (c) does the recipient well.

**Trait versus state.** In terms of research, altruism has been studied from both trait (i.e., personality) and state (i.e., temporary) perspectives. Partly because researchers (e.g., Markowski & Greenwood [1984] noted altruism as similar to empathy, sincerity, positive contribution,
adaptability, and willingness to help) have had trouble separating it from other positive characteristics, general conclusions were yet to be drawn about its coincidence with other positive personality traits. Researchers have historically studied it from a state perspective, measuring benefactors’ immediate-levels following positive and negative state-primes. Specifically, dependency and interpersonal attractiveness have been found as the two basic altruism-eliciting attributes of recipients.

*Similar to SI.* Altruists are generally found to be well-adjusted, socially adept, and unassuming people, though imprecise construct-definitions have left research conclusions exploratory and tentative. Altruism thus appears similar to SI in terms of its significance to mental health and its elusiveness and difficulty in operationalization.

*Evidence: Altruism and marital adjustment.* From a sociological perspective, authors Buerkle, Anderson, and Badgley (1961) studied altruism and role conflict as it related to marital adjustment. In this case, defining altruism as *sympathy* and *adaptability*, the authors issued a marital conflict-situation inventory in which married participants’ attitudes were measured via self-report. Comparing 186 adjusted couples with 36 couples seeking marriage counseling (‘unadjusted’ couples), the authors factor-analyzed the data and discovered altruism to be multidimensional. Specifically, the pattern between husbands’ and wives’ profiles was significantly different, though three common factors emerged. Adjusted couples: deferred to and respected each other’s feelings; deferred to and respected each other’s judgments; and gave precedence to middle-class value-conformity over otherwise altruistic tendencies. Interestingly enough, situations in which conformity was made salient, altruism was given lesser priority.

*Evidence: Altruism and situationality.* Darley and Batson (1973) acknowledged past studies’ failures to link personality (trait) variables with helping-tendencies. They also wondered
whether and which situational (i.e., state) antecedents led to altruistic behavior. Wishing to provide a new perspective on possible predictors of altruistic behavior, the authors designed a study in which specific personality traits (*religiosity*) were related with novel situational-variables (*thought content* and *sense of urgency*).

Using the *Good Samaritan Parable* for its suggested ideal personality and situational factors, the authors first measured 40 young seminary students’ religiosity via self-report. In the second session, the experimenters primed the subjects’ thought content and sense of urgency and prescribed a task of delivering a speech in the neighboring building. In the alleyway between the buildings, a confederate, dressed as a person-in-need (slumped and groaning), sat next to the path down which subjects had to run in order to enter the next building. Manipulating (i.e., priming) subjects’ thought content, and either inducing or not inducing a sense of urgency to deliver the Good Samaritan speech next door, the authors measured whether and how subjects helped.

Results indicated that subjects’ sense of urgency (*hurry*) was significantly related to whether they helped the person in need, whereas their primed thought content was not related. Multiple regression analysis indicated hurry as the significant predictor of whether and how much help was given. Overall, shedding light on the “Which variable exerts a stronger influence in predicting altruistic behavior?” debate, the situational variable of hurry was found to predict helping behavior *over* the dispositional variable of religiosity.

*Evidence: Adjustment and situationality.* In a circuitously related vein, Paulhus and Martin (1988) set out to develop an improved index of so-called *interpersonal flexibility*. Traditionally, interpersonal flexibility had been defined by two criteria: the *range* of interpersonal responses; and, the *situational appropriateness* of the response. While past
instruments suffered from the limitation of only measuring trait flexibility, the authors’ new index was proposed to measure interpersonal capabilities.

Across four separate studies, results indicated that students who scored high on the new Functional Flexibility Index (FFI) were also rated by their peers as interpersonally flexible, demonstrating the index’s criterion validity. Moreover, adjustment correlated with flexibility, though at the non-significant level, while SE emerged as significantly related to another form of interpersonal variability, situationality: Those with high SE reported low situational dependence. Overall, high-SE subjects’ behavior was not situationally dependent, interpersonal flexibility predicted adjustment, and flexibility and situationality were statistically unrelated.

Well-being and Social Interest

Concept definition. In response to prior studies’ general preoccupation with measuring life satisfaction according to economic demographic variables, Campbell (1976) reported on a study in which he and colleagues had begun a series of surveys intending to measure the quality of American life. Their goal was to define subjective, psychological dimensions of well-being. Operationalizing happiness as satisfaction, the researchers’ longer-term motive was to create a life satisfaction measure incorporating cognitive components.

Preliminary, structured-interview data drawn from 2,164 subjects indicated life satisfaction as significantly related to age and life cycle. Specifically, still-married male and female subjects with grown children were the most satisfied. On the other end, least satisfied were divorced women, followed by divorced men, however men reported less than average stress. Stress, or specifically freedom from stress, emerged as a significant co-variant with satisfaction (i.e., well-being).
Stress and SI. In a series of studies, Crandall (1978a and 1978b) directly examined the relationship between SI and coping with various forms of stress. Mentioning the interaction between early and intense feelings of inferiority, and the affected individual’s diminished capacity to develop SI and experience its benefits, the author discussed Adler’s primary interest in trait-level SI. Specifically and theoretically, a highly developed SI would function as a buffer against stressful conditions and increase the individual’s coping-capacity. Extending basic Adlerian propositions concerning SI and coping, the author hoped to demonstrate its role in coping with situational (i.e., state) stress. For this purpose he developed a state-sensitive SI-measurement tool (The State Social Interest Scale, SSIS, derived from the SIS) and asked: “Would functional SI increase or decrease in response to stress?” and “What types of stressful conditions would produce the most noticeable changes?”

Evidence: Affectual stress. In the first series of studies, Crandall (1978a) hypothesized that SI (including an overt, altruistic-behavior test), would increase following positive affect, whereas SI would decrease following a negative mood (as induced with a self-esteem threat). In study one, after establishing the state-SI inventory’s reliability with data from 84 undergraduates, experimenters asked subjects to volunteer time to a charitable organization. Subjects who agreed to volunteer scored significantly higher on the SSIS than did non-volunteering subjects. In study two, 100 subjects completed mood and SI-measures, and completed four-letter anagrams in one of either four conditions: success on anagrams, failure on anagrams, threat but no test, and control. While the success versus failure-on-affect conditions were non-significant, significant SI-differences were found according to condition: Success group subjects scored the highest on the SSIS, followed by control, threat, and failure groups. In study three, out of the prior 100 subjects, 33 agreed to complete a mood questionnaire before beginning a mid-term examination.
In the threat condition, results indicated: Subjects showed significantly more anxiety, less surgency and elation, and lower SI’s than that did those during the normal class period.

Evidence: Noise stress. In a second large study, Crandall (1978b) experimentally induced a stressful noise condition and assessed SI. While 48 undergraduate subjects attempted to complete a series of four-letter anagrams, a loudspeaker alternately played loud, intermittent industrial and crowd noises interspersed with moments of silence. Assessing his subjects’ emotional reactions (using a mood inventory) and SI-levels both before and after the noise-conditions allowed the author to determine changes in their state-affect and SI-levels. Results indicated subjects’ moods and SI-levels to be significantly affected by loud noise: Elation and surgency decreased, while anxiety and sadness increased. Second, loud noise also significantly decreased subjects’ SI scores. Third, consistent with the Adlerian theory of SI as stress buffer, high-SI subjects demonstrated more surgency and less sadness following the noise condition and were less affected by the loud noise than were low-SI subjects.

Evidence: Time, memory, and food aversion (adjustment and stress). Crandall and Reimanis (1976) reported on three studies designed to determine the validity and specify various related correlates of a then-recently developed scale for measuring SI (the SIS scale). For time orientation, 40 subjects’ scores on a measure of time emphasis were gathered. At a follow-up, 37 different subjects completed a different time-competence measure and the SIS scale. To study negative memories and SI, following completion of a childhood experience questionnaire and the SIS measure, 114 undergraduate-aged subjects’ data were compared with 30 jail inmates’ data. Food aversions were measured via 60 subjects’ self-reporting on a list of 20 various food-items. Finally, adjustment was assessed by the same 60 subjects’ answers to a single question asking them to report how generally happy and satisfied they were with their present lives. Results
indicated high-SI versus low-SI subjects to: place more emphasis and confidence on the present and future; less frequently report negative childhood memories; report less food aversions; and, indicate more positive outlooks on life.

*Cognitive and affective well-being and SI.* Crandall and Putnam (1980) prefaced their two-study summary by describing SI as providing individuals with better coping skills, healthier attitudes toward life, expanded worldviews, and a greater capacity for living life fully. The authors also explained how past studies had demonstrated numerous positive relationships between SI and personality variables, and summarized more direct evidence relating SI to measures of well-being (e.g., stress and SI). The purpose of the authors’ two studies was to deepen readers’ understanding of the relationship between SI and a larger number of measures of life satisfaction. The authors hypothesized all measures of well-being to be positively related to SI, though cautioned against cause-and-effect conclusions.

*Evidence: Well-being measures and life tasks.* In study one, a stratified sample of 82 employed adults and a pool of 27 undergraduates completed a well-being questionnaire and an SI (SIS) scale. In study two, 61 undergraduates completed the SIS scale, a desirability response set, and rated themselves on 28 seven-point scaled questions designed to assess well-being. Results supported the authors’ Adlerian hypotheses and indicated several significant correlations between SI and a variety of well-being measures. Moreover, cognitive and affective measures, as related to SI, were highly similar. Specifically, SI was positively related to satisfaction in the Adlerian life tasks of work and friendship. (Unfortunately, no questions concerning the task of love and marriage were included in the survey).
Self-Actualization and Social Interest

The recent interest into positive psychology makes today’s research into SI that much more relevant. Gable and Haidt (2005) explained positive psychology as the study of the conditions and myriad processes that contribute to the growth and optimal functioning of individuals, couples, and communities.

Evidence: Self-actualization, locus of control, and SI. In terms of individual-functioning, utilizing a sample of young women, Hjelle (1991) presented research which examined the relationship between SI, locus of control, and self-actualization. In defining SI as psychological maturity, the author hypothesized that strong beliefs in internal control would be associated with self-actualization and a high degree of SI.

Seventy-two undergraduate female subjects completed the four-scaled SII, a 40-item, perceived locus of control inventory, and a 150-question inventory measuring value and behavioral judgments in terms of inner-directed support and time competence. The results indicated obvious support for the author’s hypothesis, including: High SI was associated with high internal-control scores; and, high SI was associated with high self-actualization scores.

Meta-evidence: Optimum health, SI, and LRS. Sweeny and Witmer (1991) argued that Adler today would likely consider optimal functioning as the most useful striving and goal an individual could have. The authors blended contemporary research findings into an Adlerian psychology wellness-paradigm and presented a five-life task “Wheel of Wellness” (p. 528) in which work, friendship, and love surrounded the core tasks of self-regulation and spirituality.

The friendship and love tasks appeared most important for overall health. Loving and being loved appeared to coincide with the development of SI. The reviewed research demonstrated numerous health benefits associated with establishing and maintaining close
friendships. The life-task of love appeared to be of high psychological importance, as well. Indeed, several longitudinal studies have indicated the best predictor of mental health to be the quality of an individual’s love attachment to his or her friends, parents, children and spouse. For example, Flanagan (1978) (as cited in Sweeney & Witmer, 1991) found that the top three contributors to life satisfaction for both men and women were the relationships with their friends, children, and spouses. In addition, research had found marriage to operate as a protective factor against depression and death. The authors concluded that overall, love is essential to life satisfaction, optimal health, and length of life.

Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction with Social Interest: Summary

Empirical evidence for the significance of SI in predicting LRS was both direct and indirect. While some studies directly confirmed the relationship (e.g., marital and couples adjustment), others were less direct (e.g., cooperation related to task-success and empathy, altruism related to marital adjustment and situationality, well-being related to coping with current and past stress, self-actualization related to optimum health performance in the love task) and will receive attention below.

Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Methodology

How did our researchers study the role of SE, attachment style, and SI in predicting LRS? Because close-relationship phenomena are complex, numerous methodological challenges present themselves (Hendrick et al., 1988). In attempts to shed light on relationship processes and outcomes, researchers disentangle love-relationship dynamics by employing a wide range of methods, procedures, and measures, subjecting volunteers of varying demographic backgrounds to a variety of treatments and analyses. Along the way, variables and constructs are, oftentimes, in need of explicit definition. In addition, endeavoring to study relationships from a number of
different levels (e.g., individual and relational) often necessitates the simultaneous use of different methodologies.

**Study Designs**

*Self-report.* Despite their limitations, the self-report technique continues to dominate research into self-evaluation and interpersonal beliefs (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996). Questionnaires were the most-often employed tool across today’s studies (e.g., Crandall & Reimanis, 1976; Leary et al., 1995). All studies measured SE, attachment, SI and LRS via self-report inventories (e.g., Murray et al., 2003; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Some self-report questionnaires included open-ended questions (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2000; Downey et al., 1998), others, closed-end scales (e.g., Leary et al., 1998; Murray et al., 2000).

*Longitudinal.* While more resource-depleting, longitudinal study designs permit researchers to make more confident inferences about interactive variables (Downey et al., 1998). Moreover, in contrast with between-subject designs, participants serve as their own controls. For example, Murray et al. (2000) and Downey and Feldman (1996) studies’ incorporated longitudinal data into their research. Daily diary designs are also well-suited for investigating naturally occurring phenomena over time. Especially useful in studying conflict between couples, for example, Collins and Feeney (2000) and Murray and Bellavia (2003) employed this naturalistic technique.

*Other designs. Correlational:* By systematically and statistically weighing variables’ influences against each other, mediational analyses allow researchers to determine relative association strengths between variables (e.g., Hendrick et al., 1988; Meunier & Royce, 1988). *Observational:* Downey et al. (1998) and Collins and Feeney (2002) conducted laboratory studies in which participant couples were observed during a primed-conflict discussion.
Experimental: Most of today’s studies involved experimental manipulations during which subjects were randomly assigned to either experimental or control conditions (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Crandall & Harris, 1991).

Measures Used

In measuring constructs such as love, SE, attachment, SI, and LRS, researchers either borrowed a prior study’s tool (e.g., Rosenberg’s, 1965, SE scale (not cited); Spanier’s, 1976, LRS scale; Greever, Tseng, & Friedland’s, 1973, SI scale) or developed a tool for that study’s purposes (e.g., Downey & Feldman’s, 1996, RSQ; Locke & Williamson’s, 1959, Marital Adjustment Inventory; Paulhus & Martin’s, 1988, FFI). Researchers seemed to select and create reliable and consistent measures, and oftentimes reported detailed statistics reflecting their tools’ efficacies (e.g., Locke & Wallace, 1959).

Variables Defined

Hazan and Shaver (1994) argued that good psychological theories are rooted in the precision with which its variables are defined and operationalized. Less well-established constructs or variables such as rejection sensitivity (Downey & Feldman, 1996) and felt security (Murray et al., 2003) were explicitly defined at the beginning of their respective studies, whereas other variables such as self-esteem (SE) and love relationship satisfaction (LRS) received less formal attention, presumably because of their more widely recognized properties. Social interest was defined variously, ranging from a single dimension definition such as concern for others (Kaplan, 1991), to more broad category definitions such as commitment and success in meeting life tasks (Hjelle, 1991).
Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Limitations

Has happiness proved too general for today’s research-subject inquiry (Campbell, 1976)? The results of the present literature review should be understood and used within the context of several limitations. First, the majority of today’s results were obtained from samples of university undergraduate-aged subjects. Campbell (1976) argued that many statistics drawn from college populations are often inappropriate for ordinary people. In terms of gender, two particular studies’ samples (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Crandall & Putman, 1980) tested predominately female subjects (a two-to-one ratio). One study (Hjelle, 1991) utilized a sample comprised solely of college-aged women. Furthermore, one study relied on data from high school students (Kaplan, 1978), raising different questions concerning generalizability.

Young, Caucasian Subjects

In terms of the discussed variables, young, white, and relatively affluent university subjects (e.g., Hendrick et al., 1988; Murray et al., 2000) may perform differently on the dependent measures as opposed to other groups, thus the results of this study may not generalize to older adults, married adults (Simpson et al., 1996), or those from more diverse cultural backgrounds (e.g., Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996l; Kobak & Hazan, 1991), socioeconomic standings, and life circumstances (Stewart & Stewart, 2006).

Alternate Explanations

Second, because of the correlative nature of the data (e.g., Crandall & Putnam, 1980), cross-sectional models (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2002; Meunier & Royce, 1988) and mediational data analyses’ (e.g., Murray et al., 2005) findings are open to alternate explanations (e.g., Leary et al., 1995, study one; Murray et al., 2001b) and developmental trends are impossible to determine. The nature of this sort of data allows only indirect inferences (e.g., Murray et al.,
2005; Heimpel et al., 2002), though the true, causal dynamics are probably more complicated (e.g., Crandall & Putman, 1980; Markowski & Greenwood, 1984; Murray & Bellavia, 2003).

Finally, Hazan and Shaver (1987) aired a major concern with using products of unique-person interactions and warned against defining such results in terms of stable-trait characteristics rather that calling them what they are, products of unique and dynamic, interactional sequences.

**Small Sample Size**

Third, small sample size (e.g., Leak & Gardner, 1990; Leary et al., 1998, study four; Murray et al., 1998) posed as a potential vulnerability in the meaningfulness of the data; in this case the data may be interpreted in an exploratory fashion. Finally, the self-report technique was cited as a potential limitation (e.g., Hjelle, 1991). In Feeney’s (2002) daily diary study, the author lamented having to rely on individuals to timely complete their diaries. Moreover, Heimpel et al. (2002) utilized a self-report questionnaire on which some subjects were unable to generate and articulate responses clear enough to code.

**Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Implications**

The current literature review findings indicate that LRS does not lend itself to a simple explanation. Meeks et al. (1998) described relationships as *contexts in process*. Overall, the data imply that deep, associative networks house individuals’ SE’s, attachment-style repertoires, and SI-tendencies. In the context of love relationships, an individual’s set of self models, other models, and his or her expectation-loaded, social-interaction scripts can be either healthy (i.e., useful, cooperative, contributing), unhealthy (i.e., useless and self-serving), or somewhere in between. Unless work is done to alter the associative networks beneath his or her dysfunctional (i.e., satisfaction preventing) self and other-views (Feeney, 2002), as can be done through the
“rewriting” of the troublesome scenes, an individual’s chances for experiencing LRS become slimmer by the day. As the individual repeatedly acts out mistaken beliefs, his or her ineffectual approaches to solving life’s problems, if left untreated, are in danger of becoming habitual ways of behaving (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Self-esteem and Love Relationship Satisfaction

Today’s studies, including Leary et al.’s (1998) finding that subjects with lower SE’s appeared to have lower thresholds for feeling rejected than did higher-SE subjects, have many implications for individuals’ love relationships experiences. From the sociometer perspective, contingent on the individual SE’s acceptance-rejection sensitivity threshold, perceiving acceptance (high-SE partners feel more accepted than do low-SE partners) deactivates the felt-security system (Murray et al., 2002) and motivates the partner to demonstrate pro-relationship behaviors, i.e., he or she uses the relationship as a source of self-affirmation (Murray et al., 2001a), this increasing LRS.

Meanwhile, partners who perceive rejection (e.g., low-SE’s are more likely than high-SE’s to take responsibility for their partners’ negative moods) doubt themselves, their partners, and their relationships more frequently (e.g., Bellavia & Murray, 2003). Quickly tarnishing mutual LRS, as if the doubting-partners are protecting their more fragile senses of self, they seem to step back to protect their SE’s.

Many studies have since replicated the theoretical assumptions and initial discoveries of the sociometer hypothesis (for a review, see Murray et al., 2003). Today, Leary and Baumeister’s (2000) mature sociometer theory continues to predict that love relationships provide individuals with powerful experiences of acceptance and rejection. Each participant’s sociometer appears to function as if it were a thermometer, gauging the social situation’s temperature: warm for
acceptance, cold for rejection. Low-SE individuals appear to have sociometers with chronically low thresholds for feeling the “cold” in social situations.

*Attachment Style and Love Relationship Satisfaction*

The theoretical and empirical evidence imply attachment style as a powerful predictor of LRS (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Attachment style seems to predict the content of individuals’ self, other, and relationship-working models. Consistent differences have been found between the various attachment styles including: Secure subjects generally stay in relationships longer and report fulfilled hopes (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990); insecure subjects read more negativity in their partners’ behaviors (e.g., Feeney, 2002); and, other interpersonal differences such as insecure partners are more sensitive to rejection (Downey & Feldman, 1996), more sensitive to stress (Feeney & Kirkpatrick, 1996; Simpson et al., 1996), and less supportive and effective caregivers (Collins & Feeney, 2002) than are securely attached partners.

In general, love attachment represents the bond between two partners. Disruptions (e.g., divorce, separation, death) reveal the strength of attachment bonds and show what may have been previously taken for granted (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Moreover, the quality of attachment bonds with primary caregivers appears to predict present and future romantic-attachment behavior. In Feeney and Kirkpatrick’s (1996) study, anxious-ambivalent subjects were seen to behave similarly to infants who are anxiously attached. Even after their partner had returned to the laboratory, the anxious subjects’ stress levels persisted and they failed to use the available support as a *safe haven*. Overall, insecurity has been said to be the attachment-bond weakening culprit, underlying most destructive relationship behaviors (Feeney, 2002).

Finally, attachment theory defines love as a biological and a social attachment process: evolutionary conditions bring adults together for the common task of rearing and providing
reliable care for offspring (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Adults’ less-than-perfect approaches to love and parenting seem to stem from difficult childhood conditions and mistaken interpretations. If mistaken interpretations are left untreated, adults’ unmet attachment-needs are carried forward into adulthood where they burden love relationships and implicitly reinforce mistaken approaches in the next generation.

Social Interest and Love Relationship Satisfaction

Results from the two studies which directly compared SI and LRS showed them to be highly, positively related. Because individuals are believed to never achieve 100 percent of their potential SI, Adlerian couples therapists directly target SI during treatment (Markowski & Greenwood, 1984). Even before marriage, specific premarital training can result in increased levels of adjustment (Logan et al., 1993). Especially when partners are experiencing problems in agreement, being together, and feeling satisfied, efforts to improve SI prove beneficial (Markowski & Greenwood, 1984). Moreover, in terms of efficiency, as opposed to static variables, SI’s nature as a process variable makes it a logical intervention starting point. Finally, especially for use within the love, self-significance, and friendship tasks, developing SI skills in children is the parents’ primary responsibility; the next generation’s marital success hangs in the balance.

Age and gender. Meunier and Royce’s (1988) data clearly presented the trend that SI increases with age. Moreover, Kaplan (1991) found higher SI’s in young women versus young adult men, helping him to speculate whether our society teaches women to value SI more than it does men. Thus, marriage and coupleship may be more challenging for individuals in their earlier years, especially for younger men. Kaplan (1991) also wondered whether young women
would be more successful than young men in life-task coping. If this were the case, specifically for young men, certain educational experiences could be designed to promote SI-growth.

**Cooperation.** Kaplan (1978) found significant support for the predicted positive relationship between SI and cooperation. Markowski and Greenwood (1984) argued that SI is largely accountable for the cooperation necessary for intracouple agreement; in turn, agreement deepens feelings of belongingness and strengthens cohesion. In relating life-task themes with SI, Logan et al. (1993) stated that their positive findings confirmed the value of cooperation over competition in satisfying marriages. Finally, Crandall and Harris (1991) found an association between SI and a type of overt cooperative behavior which was highly resistant to change, even in the face of conflicting ego-interests.

**Altruism.** While none of today’s studies directly correlated SI with altruism, altruism appeared to coincide with adjustment. Specifically, altruism seemed contingent on interpersonal attractiveness and feelings of dependency. For example, in Darley and Batson’s (1973) Good Samaritan experiment, subjects gave priority to honoring their experimenter’s dependence on them to accomplish their task over that of helping a needy person. The authors concluded that conflict rather than callousness explained their subjects’ preference to doing their assigned task over helping the needy person. Thus, strengthening each partner’s dependency feelings on the other may reduce the likelihood of destructive interpersonal behavior.

In terms of couples adjustment, while mutual altruism characterized well-adjusted couples (Buerkle et al., 1961), its appearance was also shown to be more contingent on situational (e.g., conformity to values) versus dispositional variables. In Paulhus and Martin’s (1988) study, relating interpersonal flexibility, SE, situationality, and adjustment, however, a high SE was seen to mediate the situational effect (high SE predicted low situationality), and
interpersonal flexibility (wide range and appropriateness of response) predicted adjustment. The situationally flexible subjects were shown to be unlikely to cave in to demands (i.e., more self-directed), and seemed to operate from what looked like a strong internal locus of control. Thus, strengthening each partner’s SE may increase the likelihood of mutual altruism.

*Well-being.* Similar to the concept of altruism, whether researchers defined it as satisfaction or happiness, and though well-being’s definition varied, it was highly significant in relation to measures of SI (Crandall & Putman, 1980). Indeed, at the outset, Crandall (1978a) stated that feelings of security and well-being are highly beneficial to the growth and utilization of SI.

Empirically, stress appeared to impact subjects’ well-being and SI. Various stressors were related to measures of SI, including loud noise, task failure, time orientation, negativity of early memories, and food pickiness. While SI was predicted to act as a buffer against stress, today’s studies confirmed the prediction. Loud noise was observed to temporarily lower SI, though less so in subjects with high SI. Stressors which directly (failure on task, and impending exam) threatened SE had a greater impact on SI (Crandall, 1978a) perhaps predicting that those partners with more fragile senses of self-worth would be more prone to feel the impact of stress, and also more prone to act out in relationships during stressful times than those partners with solid senses of self. In the same study, induced, negative affect was seen to reduce subjects’ overt helping behavior. Again, negative implications for love relationships abound.

In terms of time orientation, Crandall and Reimanis (1976) indicated SI as conducive to a positive outlook on life and positively related to a healthy and constructive orientation to an individual’s past, present, and future. According to Bellavia and Murray (2003), partners who are
positive and optimistic about their relationship’s past, present, and future are likely to feel satisfied and have satisfied partners.

Rather than indicate a cause-and-effect relationship, Crandall and Putnam’s (1980) data implied a mutual interaction between SI, well-being, and stress. The authors interpreted their findings to be consistent with Adler’s view that SI provides courage and psychological strength. Overall, well-being measures tapped feelings of competence, zest, enthusiasm, and satisfaction with life, all constructive elements for building and maintaining LRS.

Self-actualization. Defining well-being as self-actualization, and SI as a cooperative, empathetic attitude toward others, Hjelle (1991) found high-SI female subjects to be more internally controlled and significantly more self-actualized than those subjects with low SI. The author defined his findings as evidence for Adler’s criterion for psychological health, SI. In addition, Sweeney and Witmer’s (1991) research into self-actualization and the Adlerian life-tasks demonstrated optimal self-regulation as associated with spontaneity and emotional responsiveness. Also, creativity and a healthy sense of humor were found to be related to self-actualization, characteristics synonymous with SI and highly beneficial for building and maintaining LRS.

Predicting Love Relationship Satisfaction: Future Research

If SE, attachment style, and SI are only three of the factors determining LRS, what about the other variables? Generally, researchers have emphasized the need to examine love relationships from a variety of perspectives and directions (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Hendrick et al., 1988). For example, Hazan and Shaver (1994) argued for the integration of attachment style into studies of LRS; today’s study accomplished just that. The need to continue
to clarify the underlying dynamics and processes involved in love relationships will guarantee the resurfacing of studies relating SE, attachment style, SI, and LRS.

From the social-cognitive standpoint, adopting a transactional view of internal working models seems to be indicated (Hazan & Shaver, 1994). For example, to what degree is security or anxiety related to low SE and insecure attachment versus factors unique to different partners and circumstances (Hazan & Shaver, 1987)? Longitudinal study designs would provide a more dynamic picture about how working models change during a relationship’s course (Kobak & Hazan, 1991), as well as allow researchers to more fully investigate the interactive effects of SE, attachment security, and spouse behavior (Feeney, 2002). In general, researchers will need to continue to develop more direct measures of relationship processes and outcomes (Feeney & Noller, 1990).

Self-esteem, Attachment Style, and Social Interest

In terms of the contingencies of interpersonal acceptance, how do personality and cultural variables interact with conditional versus unconditional relationship primes (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996)? Moreover, do other relationships in personality and social psychology assumed to be linear also have curvilinear components (thresholds and sensitivities) (Leary et al., 1998)?

Perceived partner regard (PPR) also deserves attention in future research projects. First, because the links between SE, attachment style, SI, and relationship perceptions seem to be reciprocal, researchers need to further disentangle the complex causal dynamics involved (Murray et al., 2000; Murray et al., 2001b). Second, while PPR has been implicated in security models functioning as a preventative mechanism, under which conditions might PPR serve to boost SE, strengthen attachment bonds, expand SI, and promote LRS (Murray et al., 2005)?
Moreover, self-doubt seems to deflate LRS in romantic relationships. How can we lessen the perceived risks of rejection and turn relationships into SE-inflators (Murray et al., 2001a), attachment-bond strengtheners, and SI-expanders? In a related vein, future research would benefit from delineating the conditions that might interfere with low SE, insecurely attached, and low-SI individuals’ chronic, self-defeating, and negative thought processes (Murray et al., 1998).

Rejection sensitivity (RS) will continue to receive researchers’ attention as they attempt to more closely identify the situations that produce and reinforce feelings of rejection in low-SE and insecurely attached individuals (Downey & Feldman, 1996). Another remaining question includes: How deeply ingrained is RS? And: How can we best teach high RS individuals to demonstrate pro-relationship behaviors (Murray et al., 2002)? In conjunction with longitudinal data, observational laboratory studies will continue to be performed in the hope of untangling variables such as these (Downey et al., 1998).

**Social Interest**

Teasing out the separate effects between confounding variables in studies relating age and SI will require more sophisticated experimental designs (Meunier & Royce, 1988). As far as sex and SI differences, Sulliman (1973) found no differences whereas Kaplan (1991) reported a significant difference. Further investigations are needed.

In terms of altruistic tendencies, Darley and Batson (1973) discovered that whether an individual helped was determined by the situation (as opposed to disposition); however, how an individual helps could use further clarification. In addition, continuing to chart out which personality characteristics are consistently associated with altruism would be useful. Also, Paulhus and Martin’s (1988) concept of functional flexibility would benefit from real world studies of marital success, e.g., how does interpersonal flexibility empirically impact LRS?
Crandall’s (1978a, 1978b) findings relating stress and SI’s function as a stress-buffer were found in an experimental group setting. Is SI’s buffering-effect present only when individuals believe that others are suffering in the same way (Crandall, 1978b)? Further research is necessary to control for possible alternate explanations. Moreover, the finding that noise-stress temporarily reduced SI suggests that other physical stressors may have similar effects. Finally, clarifying the relationships between different kinds of affect and SI would also prove useful.

Sweeney and Witmer’s (1991) wellness paradigm is a familiar concept to Adlerians. However, research literature in other disciplines could benefit from similar integrative frameworks, useful for organizing research findings. In the end, whether we wish to delineate the conditions surrounding relationship wellness, optimal functioning, or love relationship actualization, determining the complete nature of the relationship between love relationship adjustment and SI will require further investigation (Markowski & Greenwood, 1984).

**Discussion**

Psychologists have a prominent role in determining the factors related to life satisfaction and happiness (Campbell, 1976). However, Meeks et al., (1998) forewarned us in stating that “…any attempt to use ‘satisfaction’ as some sort of magical, summative outcome variable...is to overvalue satisfaction while devaluing the inevitable changingness of relationships and the healthy tension that may contribute to temporary relationship dissatisfaction but long-term relational richness” (p. 770).

A love relationship involves hard work; it is a responsibility we all must face. Individuals working in the helping professions will forever be in a process of building their knowledge and skills for assisting others to not only survive, but to also transcend many of life’s challenges (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991), including the many challenging conditions in love relationships. In
providing an encouraging climate and context for growth, striving for wellness and satisfaction becomes a process likely to extend over the inspired client’s entire lifespan.

Maslow’s (1963, as quoted in Crandall & Putnam, 1980) vision of the self-actualizing individual’s zest for life provides us with a glimpse into a set of characteristics which are interchangeable when describing a fully, socially interested individual and partner in love. While the potential for, and the apex of well-being, happiness, and maximum life satisfaction can be well-defined in terms of an individual’s optimal level of functioning, very much associated with peak functioning is indeed success in the task of love.

Generally, social interest is the key; for the individual it provides access to an unfathomably rich quarry of psychic and physical sustenance. Specifically, while cooperation and contribution are the outward manifestations, the accompanying inward realizations provide the courage and strength for successfully meeting the challenges of life and love successfully.

**Conclusion**

In the end, how far can we expect today’s science to take us? Through the lens of philosophical materialism we view and review modern-day scientific evidence. The human race’s best tool (“Scientific Method”) in the search for truth allows us to, at most, evaluate and manipulate the world. This indicates that, in reality, our science’s range is limited to its ability to, at best, make the inexplicable comprehensible (Hawkins, 2001): We can talk about conditions, not causes. So for now, given our tool’s limitations, nature’s processes remain largely unpredictable. At the same time, we have not left our intuition at the door; after all, creativity is the driving force behind the evolution of our nature (Adler, 1979).

According to today’s standards, the concepts of any theory which endeavors to advance our understanding of human nature, including Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology, must
ultimately be subject to scientific verification (Hjelle, 1991). Indeed, Adler’s belief in the importance of a well-developed social interest for love relationship satisfaction has found considerable support here.

In conclusion, organizing the variables associated with love relationships satisfaction, attempting to build a descriptive base, and devising a holistic picture of the conditions associated with LRS has been both challenging and enlightening. Because accumulating facts in the absence of theory is inefficient (Hazan & Shaver, 1994), and can feel chaotic and downright self-destructive, we are thankful to have had Adler’s science of Individual Psychology as a theoretical and empirical roadmap. In conjunction with self-esteem and attachment core-constructs, the Adlerian ideal of social interest has provided us with a powerful, integrative framework for simply *talking about, rather than predicting*, love relationship satisfaction. Intended to inspire the kind of creative thought and conceptual debate that will hopefully advance the clinical work and research of Individual Psychologists and those studying close relationships, we happily carry on with the courage to conduct imperfect science.
References


Crandall, J. E., & Reimanis, G. (1976). Social interest and time orientation, childhood memories,
adjustment, and crime. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 32*(2), 203-211.


120-123.


