Approach and avoidance motivation in close relationships

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Approach and avoidance motives relationships:

"Laughter is the closest distance between two people." Victor Borge

"My toughest fight was with my first wife." – Muhammad Ali

Close relationships can be the source of incredible joy; but they can also be the source of profound pain. The incentives in relationships are many, including affection, laughter, intimacy, love, and companionship. What has been long understood by the public and increasingly documented by science is that the rewards in relationships are quite beneficial to health and well-being. For example, when asked what gives their lives purpose and meaning, people often put relationships at the top of their list (Klinger, 1977; Little, 1989); and when asked to look back across their lives, people cite close friends and family relationships as a significant source of their happiness (Sears, 1977). In a study of over 2,000 Americans, Campbell and colleagues (1976) found that marriage and family life were the best predictors of overall life satisfaction. Looking at the happiest people (i.e., the top 10% of the sample using multiple converging reports), Diener and Seligman (2002) found that the one thing they all had in common was that they had strong positive social relationships. And, in a review of over 80 published studies, Uchino, Cacioppo, and Kiecolt-Glaser (1996) found a robust association between positive social ties and physiological markers of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems.

The threats in relationships, however, are almost equal in number, such as conflict, rejection, competition, jealously, and grief. Also long understood by laypersons and the research community is that the harsh features of relationships are detrimental to health and well-being. More than half of people seeking psychotherapy cite some type of problems with relationships as a reason for beginning treatment (Pinsker, 1985). The possibility of rejection or negative evaluation from others and negative emotional exchanges between relationship partners have been repeatedly associated with heightened activity in physiological stress systems, such as increased cortisol production (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004) and ambulatory blood pressure (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2003). There is even evidence that the brain processes social pain and physical pain similarity (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Regrettably, relationships can also pose a direct threat to physical health through the violence enacted by intimate

partners at alarmingly high rates (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

In short, social relationships are ripe with potential rewards and potential punishments. Despite the seemingly precarious balance between incentives and threats in interpersonal relationships, across the life span people are nevertheless tenaciously motivated to form and maintain strong and stable social bonds; failing to do so is linked with higher mortality and lower health and well-being (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995; House, Landis, and Umberson, 1988). Yes surprisingly little work has investigated the processes involved in establishing, maintaining, and dissolving social bonds from a motivational or goal theory perspective. A long standing distinction in the field of motivation is the focus of motives and goals. Motives and goals can be focused on a rewarding, desired end-state (approach); or motives and goals can be focused on a punishing, undesired end-state (avoidance). This distinction seems particularly appropriate for understanding how people simultaneously regulate social incentives and social threats. Previous motivation research in other domains (e.g., achievement, power) has also shown us that the approach—avoidance distinction is fundamental and yields important insights, such as the finding that avoidance motives and goals are often associated with less effective regulation and poorer outcomes (e.g., Elliot & Sheldon, 1998).

Much of the work on social relationships has failed to simultaneously examine processes involved in obtaining rewards (e.g., laughter) and processes involved in averting punishments (e.g., conflict). Because interpersonal relationships consistently present both threats and incentives, it is imperative to simultaneously address the approach dimension and the avoidance dimension. Implicit in this perspective is the recognition that the presence of incentives is not the same as the absence of threats, nor is the presence of threats the same as the absence of incentives. In other words, the approach and avoidance systems are largely independent of one another and a person's behavior can be driven by either or both types of motives. Finally, there is also growing evidence that interpersonal goals have a far greater influence on cognition, emotion, and behavior than previously anticipated. That is, recent research shows that close relationship goals affect numerous psychological processes in seemingly unrelated domains, and often without our explicit knowledge of their power. For example, Shah (2003)

recently found that priming goals related to significant others affected goal pursuit for, and performance on, an unrelated achievement task; and the effect was moderated by one's closeness to the significant other. In the remainder of this manuscript I will attempt to integrate ideas the historically distinct fields of close relationships and motivation; and present evidence that an approach—avoidance perspective holds promise for furthering our understanding of both motivation and social relationships.

Approach and Avoidance Motivation: Historical roots and contemporary evidence

The distinction between approach and avoidance motives and goals has a long and prolific history in psychological theory and research (for reviews see Elliot, 1999; Higgins, 1998). Pavlov (1927) described two reflexes, one orienting an organism toward a stimulus and the other turning the organism away from a stimulus. In a comprehensive comparative review, Schneirla (1959) found evidence for this "towardness" and "awayness" distinction across diverse species, suggesting evolutionarily early phylogenic roots. Miller's (1959, 1961) classic research on separate approach and withdrawal learning processes and graphical representations of their interplay in approach and avoidance conflict gradients provides another early example.

Several contemporary theories of motivation and goal processes have featured the approach and avoidance distinction. In particular, Jeffrey Gray's work (1970; 1987; 1994) has generated considerable attention. Gray posited distinct appetitive and aversive motivational systems, referred to as the Behavioral Activation System (BAS) and the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), respectively. Gray's model outlines personality as a function of individual differences in the two systems which have neuroanatomical and neurophysiological correlates. Specifically Gray (1987) describes BAS as a function of the limbic circuits and dopaminergic pathways; and the BIS system as rooted in circuits in the hippocampus and the septum and related structures. The appetitive system (BAS) activates behavior in response to signals of reward and non-punishment, whereas the aversive system (BIS) inhibits behavior in response to signals of punishment, nonreward, and novel stimuli. Gray's (1994) theory also links motivation to emotion: BAS is associated with feelings of hope and approach behaviors, whereas activation of the BIS is associated with feelings of anxiety and avoidance behaviors (Gray, 1990).

Several other theories of motivation and regulatory processes have implicitly or explicitly made the distinction between approach and avoidance dimensions. For example, in his theory of regulatory focus, Higgins (1998) distinguishes between the regulation of behavior that is focused on positive end-states and self-regulation of behavior that is focused on negative end-states; referring to the former as a promotion focus and the latter as a prevention focus. Carver and Scheier's model of self-regulation (1990) is based on a feedback process in which information from the environment is compared to an internal reference, then an output occurs, after that the environment is re-evaluated and compared to the internal reference, and the process continues. Some feedback processes attempt to reduce the discrepancy between the input and the internal reference (discrepancy-reducing loops) and some feedback processes attempt to enlarge this discrepancy (discrepancy-enlarging loops). Carver (1996) has described these two feedback systems as approach and avoidance processes, respectively. In the domain of achievement, Elliot (1997) has made the distinction between approach and avoidance, describing approach motives as those consisting of the need for achievement and avoidance motives as those focused on a fear of failure.

One reason the approach and avoidance distinction has been so prevalent throughout the years is because it has important implications for understanding perception, cognition, emotion, behavior, health, and well-being (e.g., Derryberry & Reed, 1994; Elliot & Sheldon, 1998; Higgins, Shah & Friedman, 1997). For example, Derryberry and Reed (1994) found that individuals with strong approach motives were biased toward cues indicating gain, and those with strong avoidance motives were biased toward negative cues indicating loss in a basic visual target detection task. Higgins and colleagues (1997) have shown that promotion-focused goals produce cheerfulness-dejection responses (success = cheerful; failure = dejection) and prevention-focused goals produce quiescence-agitation responses (success = quiescence; failure = agitation). And, Elliot and Sheldon (1998) found that higher numbers of avoidance personal goals predicted lower well-being and greater physical symptom reports, both prospectively and retrospectively.

Another reason the approach and avoidance distinction has consistently emerged in motivation (as well as in other areas in psychology (e.g., Gable, Reis, and Elliot (2003) may be stem from the

biological distinction made by Mother Nature, which has been increasingly documented by science. For example, Sutton and Davidson (1997) found that Gray's BIS and BAS constructs predicted different components of resting prefrontal asymmetry as measured with electroencephalographic (EEG) technology. Higher BAS was associated with more relative left prefrontal activation, whereas higher BIS scores were associated with greater relative right prefrontal activation. Other researchers have induced emotions in the laboratory and measured corresponding neural activity with the EEG. Anticipation of a reward corresponds with left frontal activation and anticipation of a punishment is associated with right frontal activation (Sobotka, Davidson, & Senulis, 1992). Finally, Reuter and colleagues (2004) found that BAS sensitivity was associated with hippocampus-parahippocampus activity in the left hemisphere in response to erotic stimuli; and high BIS subjects showed increased activity in numerous regions of interest in the brain when exposed to fear and disgust images (although it is worth noting that the regions activated did not map directly onto the substrates that Gray theorized composed BIS).

As pointed out above, the research indicates that motives to approach incentives are largely independent from motives to avoid threats. This relative independence means that the two systems may influence outcomes through different processes. For example, Gable, Reis, and Elliot (2000) examined individual differences in approach and avoidance motives (as measured by BAS and BIS) and reactions to daily events. They found that individuals who scored higher on BIS sensitivity reported more daily negative affect and those with high BAS sensitivity reported more daily positive affect. However, the processes that mediated the associations between approach motives and positive affect and between avoidance motives and negative affect were different. Those with higher BAS scores reported experiencing more frequent positive events (differential exposure) than those with lower BAS scores. When positive events did occur (i.e., controlling for frequency) BAS did not predict changes in positive emotion. Those with higher BIS scores did not report experiencing more frequent or more important negative events than those with lower BIS scores; however high BIS was associated with experiencing more negative emotion when negative events did occur (differential reactivity). This research suggests that allow approach and avoidance motives are both associated with important outcomes (e.g., daily

emotional experience), they may influence those outcomes via different routes.

What hopefully is clear from this review is that there is that the approach—avoidance distinction has a long history that is bolstered by contemporary empirical support. Indeed, recent advances in neuroscience have only confirmed long held notions regarding neuron-anatomical roots. What may not be as clear though is that the approach—avoidance distinction has not been examined in the specific domain of social relationships (exceptions are detailed below) nearly as well as in the achievement domain and with domain non-specific motives and goals. However, there has been some work on social motivation in this context, which is reviewed below.

Social motivation: Affiliation and intimacy motives

Interest in social motives has waxed and waned over the years. Early work by Murray included several social needs (e.g., sex, nurturance) in the list of universal needs, but the need for affiliation by far received the most attention. Using the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT; Morgan & Murray, 1935), Shipley and Veroff (1952) compared stories from control groups to stories from subjects who were threatened with rejection or separation from a group (e.g., a fraternity). They created a coding scheme to assess the strength of the need for affiliation (nAff). Surprisingly, nAff was negatively correlated with popularity scores. The narrow basis (i.e., threat of rejection) for nAff in the TAT was expanded on by Atkinson and colleagues (1954) to include themes of establishing and maintaining positive feelings in relationships with others. They speculated that there were actually two types of need for affiliation, one aroused in conditions of rejection or separation threats and one aroused in conditions of potential positive affiliation outcomes.

DeCharms (1957) then devised a new coding scheme for TAT stories that included separate scores for approach affiliation (+Aff) and avoidance affiliation (-Aff). He found that –Aff was positively correlated with productivity in competitive groups and negatively correlated with productivity in cooperative groups. However, the this new coding scheme for TAT was still based on the original experiment by Shipley and Veroff (1952) that defined affiliation as a concern with rejection and separation. Moreover, all of the work on social motivation conducted up to this point was done so from

the theoretical point of view of Murray's (1938) deficit model of needs or Miller's (1959) drive reduction theory of conflict. Boyatzis (1973) contended that an approach affiliation motive did not conform to these models of needs. Specifically, he reasoned that the existence of close relationships would not decrease approach affiliation motives, which would be predicted from deficit or drive reduction models. Rather, he thought that obtaining positive incentives in relationships would stimulate more approach motivation.

Also breaking from the narrow definition of affiliation motivation being based on concerns with rejection, evaluation, or separation, Mehrabian (1976) described two social motives, a sensitivity to rejection (avoidance) and an affiliative tendency (approach). This work was based on expectancy theories and sensitivity to rejection was hypothesized to stem from expectations of negative social reinforcers whereas the affiliative tendency was hypothesized to stem from expectation of positive social reinforcers. Mehrabian and colleagues found that people high on affiliative tendency were less anxious and more confident, elicited more positive affect from others, and saw themselves as similar to others, compared to those low on affiliative tendency. People high in sensitivity to rejection were less confident and were judged less positively by others than people low on sensitivity to rejection

Although the majority of work on social motivation has focused on affiliation or rejection motives, there has been some work by McAdams (1982) on intimacy motivation. He described intimate interactions as those that had mutual pleasure, openness, and reciprocal dialogue. In an experience sampling study, intimacy motivation was positively related to the frequency of interpersonal thoughts and positive emotions in interpersonal situations, and it was negatively related to desire to be alone during interpersonal interactions. Both affiliation motivation and intimacy motivation predicted time spent in interpersonal communications (verbal and written). Only affiliation motivation predicted desire to be interacting with others when alone (McAdams & Constantian, 1983). Intimacy motivation also predicted self-disclosure among friends, listening behavior, and concern for the well-being of friends (McAdams, Healy, & Krause, 1984). Intimacy motivation seems particularly important for the study of existing close relationships, however, it has not been examined from an approach and avoidance perspective.

In sum, there is a respectable body of literature examining social motives, albeit much smaller than the body of literature devoted to achievement motives. Much of this previous work did not explicitly examine both approach and avoidance social motives. The lack of attention to approach and avoidance social motivation is likely a large oversight for many reasons, not the least of which is the recent evidence for the existence of neurobiological circuitry for social motivational/attachment reward and threat systems in mammals and humans (e.g., Depue & Morrone-Strapinksy, 2005; Insel, 2000; Panksepp, 1998). In the remainder of this chapter I will describe a new hierarchical model of approach and avoidance social motivation. I will also present recent evidence in support of this model and, most importantly an outline of topics that are need of empirical attention.

A Hierarchical Model of Approach and Avoidance Social Motives and Goals

The basic model. In Gable (2006), I presented a model of approach and avoidance social motives and goals. The model is depicted in Figure 1. The model outlines how dispositional individual differences (i.e., social motives), environmental factors, and short-term strivings (i.e., social goals) influence social behaviors and social outcomes are simultaneously addressed. The model is hierarchical because dispositional approach social motives and incentives in the social environment are hypothesized to predispose people to adopt short-term approach social goals; and dispositional avoidance social motives and threats in the social environment are hypothesized to predispose people to adopt avoidance social goals. For example, in a discussion on household finances, a husband who has strong approach social motives and recently has had several enjoyable interactions with his wife will be more likely to adopt approach goals, such as “I want to us to have a pleasant discussion and for both of us to be satisfied with the outcome”; whereas a husband who has strong avoidance motives and recently has recently experienced friction with his wife will be more likely to adopt avoidance goals, such as “I want to avoid an argument and for neither of us to be resentful of the outcome.” Or, upon meeting a potential dating partner, a person who has strong approach social motives or who finds him/herself in an environment rich with dating opportunities will be more likely to adopt approach goals, such as “I want to get to know this person and make a good impression”; whereas someone who has strong aversive motives or finds

him/herself in a hostile and competitive dating environment will be more likely to adopt avoidance goals, such as “I don’t want to be rejected or make a fool of myself”.

As outlined in the model, approach and avoidance goals should be associated with different social outcomes. Approach social goals should be more strongly associated with outcomes defined by the presence or absence of rewarding social bonds, such as affiliation, companionship, and intimacy. Avoidance social goals should be more strongly associated with outcomes defined by the presence or absence of punishing social bonds, such as rejection, isolation, and conflict. That is, individuals who have strong approach motives and goals (and/or find themselves in a incentive-rich social milieu), define successful interactions and relationships as those which provide incentives (e.g., fun, companionship, and understanding); and painful relationships are defined as those that fail to provide these rewards. Individuals who have strong avoidance motives (and/or find themselves in a high threat social environment), define positive interactions and relationships as those that lack threats (e.g., uncertainty, disagreements, and anxiety); and painful relationships are defined as those that possess these negative qualities. The final aspect of the model recognized that social outcomes (incentives and threats) combine to form global evauations of the social network and relationship quality.

Recent work has provided evidence for the model. In a series of studies Gable (2006) found that distal social motives predicted more proximal goals, supporting the hierarchical nature of social motivation. Specifically, people with strong approach social motives, such as hope for affiliation were more likely to adopt short-term approach social goals, such as “I want to make friends” and “I want to spend more quality time with my partner”. People with strong avoidance social motives, such as fear of rejection, were more likely to adopt short-term avoidance social goals, such as “I don’t want to be lonely” and “I want to avoid upsetting my partner”. Also as predicted by the model shown in Figure 1, approach and avoidance motives and goals were associated with different patterns of social outcomes. Specifically, strong approach goals predicted less loneliness, greater well-being, and more satisfying relationships, concurrently and over time; and strong avoidance goals predicted more loneliness, greater anxiety about relationships, and more physical symptoms, concurrently and over time (Gable, 2006; Elliot, Gable, &

Mapes, 2006). In addition, the effects of social goals are better predictors of social outcomes than general sensitivity to reward and punishment (i.e., BIS/BAS; Gable, 2006).

The research summarized above assessed an array of social relationships that individuals were engaged in at a given time (e.g., friends, family, romantic partners). Other work has focused on the influence of approach and avoidance social goals in a particular close relationship (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005; Impett, Peplau, & Gable, 2005). For example, approach and avoidance motives for everyday sacrifice (i.e., enacting a behavior that is not preferred, such as going to a movie of your partner's choice, skipping a night out with friends to help your partner paint a room) in dating couples were examined in a daily experience study with a longitudinal follow-up (Impett, Gable, & Peplau, 2005). Approach motives for sacrifice (e.g., to promote intimacy) were positively associated with personal and relationship well-being, whereas avoidance motives for sacrifice (e.g., to avoid conflict) were negatively associated with personal well-being and positively associated with conflict. Strong avoidance motives for sacrifice also predicted relationship dissolution two months later. Also interesting was the finding that when people thought their partners were making sacrifices for avoidance motives, their personal well-being and relationship satisfaction declined.

In short, there is empirical support for the links between distal social motives and more proximal social goals; and the links between these motives and goals and social outcomes. There is also preliminary evidence that approach goals are associated with outcomes characterized by the presence of incentives and that avoidance are associated with outcomes characterized by the absence of threats. There remains much work to be done on other aspects of the model. For example, the links between the conditions of the current social environment and social goals has not been examined. Perhaps more pressing though is an understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes that mediate the links between social motives and goals and social outcomes. Processes that are likely candidates for mediators are described in the following section.

Mediating Processes. As mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter, because approach and avoidance motives/goals are largely independent of one another, the processes that link them to social

outcomes can be different. That is, the processes mediating the link between approach goals and intimacy might be different from the processes mediating the links between avoidance goals and security, for example. Thus far, most of the work on the processes mediating the links between social goals and social outcomes such as relationship satisfaction, loneliness, and social anxiety has focused on social events. These studies have found that people with strong avoidance motives and goals rated negative social events, such as disagreements with a partner and criticism from a friend, as more important than the same events for people with weaker avoidance motives and goals; and they reacted with more negative emotions when these events occurred (Gable, 2006; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000; Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006). However, avoidance motives and goals have not been consistently associated with how many negative social events people experience (Gable, 2006; Gable, Elliot, & Reis, 2000). In contrast, individuals who have strong approach motives and goals consistently report experiencing a greater number of number of positive social events, such as going out to eat with a partner and being complimented by a friend, than those with weaker approach motives and goals. Finally, approach goals do not predict how important positive social events are rated, nor do approach goals predict how much positive affect is experienced when positive events do occur (Elliot, Gable, & Mapes, 2006; Gable, 2006; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000). Taken as a whole, these results suggest that avoidance goals are associated with outcomes primarily through a process of increased reactivity to social threats, whereas approach goals are associated with outcomes primarily through a process of increased exposure to social incentives. What other processes might mediate the links between social motives and goals? And, what specific perceptual, cognitive, and affective processes account for differences in reactivity and exposure? Possible answers to these questions constitute the remainder of this chapter. Specifically, five candidates for mediating processes are discussed.

Attention. Prior to responding to social incentives and threats, individuals must first attend to them. For example, some people seem to easily notice a smiling face in a crowd, whereas other are more apt to recognize a fleeting disapproving glance. Biases in attention have long been of interest to psychologists, and research on general approach and avoidance motivation has shown that individual

differences in these motives predict biases toward rewarding and threatening stimuli, respectively. For example, Avila and Parcet (2002) showed that participants higher in BAS (compared to those low in BAS) were more attentive to targets when they were primed with a positive incentive cue than no cue. Studies have also shown that high trait anxiety (which is closely linked to avoidance motivation; Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2004) is associated with increased attention to threatening cues (Mathews & MacLeod, 1994).

Recently in our lab we have begun to use some methods developed to test attention biases. The first is the emotional Stoop task, which has been used most frequently to study anxiety and attention. Subjects are presented with a word printed in colored ink. They are asked to name the color of a word (or of the overlay), and if the word is threatening, people who are highly anxious (trait or state) have slower reaction times. These delays are thought to reflect increased attention to the threatening word (MacLeod & Mathews, 1988) because people are unable to take their attention off the threatening word and attend to the color of the ink. Segerstrom (2001) also used this method to study attention to rewards, and found, that optimists show more interference for positive words than pessimists. Attention biases also show domain specificity. For example, participants with phobias of spiders were slower to respond to words related to spiders (e.g., web) than those who were not spider phobic; but the spider phobics did not differ from controls in their responses to other threatening words (see Williams, et al, 1996).

A variation on this technique uses images. The images are presented with a semi-transparent color overlay (van Honk et al, 2000). Participants are asked to ignore the image and name the color of the overlay as quickly as possible. Again, differences in reaction times reflect interference from the image. To examine the association between social goals and attention to social incentives and threats, human faces displaying different emotions (e.g., happiness, anger, sadness) were used as stimuli (Gable & Berkman, 2007). We found that increases in the strength of approach social goals were associated with biases in attention to happy faces and away from angry faces; and increases in the strength of avoidance social goals were associated with biases in attention to sad faces.

Another technique used to study links between anxiety and attention is Dot-Probe Task. In this

task a threatening word and a neutral word are simultaneously presented on a computer screen. After a 500 ms delay a dot appears where one of the words previously was located, and participants press a key indicating the dot's location. Anxious people are faster at responding to the dot when it appears in the threatening word space than in the neutral word space, whereas non-anxious people do not show this bias (MacLeod & Mathews, 1988). In our lab employed a variation of the Dot Probe task that used the human facial images described above. Specifically, two faces were presented to subjects side-by side and then removed. Next, a dot appeared in the place of one of the faces, and participants indicated which location the dot appeared. The results indicated that participants with stronger approach social goals showed biases in attention to the more positive face (e.g., happy versus neutral; neutral versus negative), compared to those with weaker approach goals (Gable & Berkman, 2007). We also used trials with pictures of nonsocial stimuli (ice cream, chair, garbage), however social goals did not predict responses in these trials.

Results from our lab provide preliminary evidence that one mechanism by which social goals may affect outcomes such as loneliness and relationship satisfaction is that goals direct attention toward or away from different social cues. More work is needed to understand these attentional biases, but it is likely that they are one important pathway through which social goals influence everyday social interactions and consequently long-term social outcomes. For example, a woman offers a fleeting smile to her partner from across the table during the family dinner. Does her partner recognize the smile—providing an opportunity for a quick connection? Instead, does the smile go unnoticed—the opportunity lost? Or, the same woman shows a fleeting frown to her partner from across the table. Does her partner register the frown—possibly taking offense? Instead, does the frown go unnoticed? While each exchange may be small, it is these dozens, perhaps hundreds, of daily interactions that form the basis of close relationships.

Interpretation of ambiguous social information. Another process integral to navigating the social world is interpretation. This is especially important in social interactions because a good portion of social behavior is ambiguous or the intentions of the social actor are unclear. When a friend comments "You look great, today", is the implication that most days your physical appearance is sub par, or is the comment an innocent admiration of today's wardrobe choice? Is your partner's distant mood a reflection of the discussion you had this morning or something that happened at work? Indeed, there is often no clear standard by which to judge social cues and social goals may influence how information is viewed. Being particularly attuned to social incentives may bias one to interpret information as positive in order to take advantage of all opportunities; whereas being particularly attuned to social threats may bias one toward interpreting information as negative so as not to miss a potential heartache.

Strachman and Gable (2006) conducted a study in which participants were presented with a common social scenario and asked to reproduce the story. The results showed that social goals influence the interpretation of ambiguous or neutral information. Specifically they found that strong avoidance goals were associated with interpreting seemingly neutral social information with a negative spin. For example, the original story contained information about the time a man picked up his date. Participants with strong avoidance goals were more likely to interpret this information negatively; for example stating that the man was late picking up his date (there was no mention of him being late in the original story). Although this research did not examine a real relationships (participants interpreted the behavior of a fictitious person), the implications that negatively interpreting neutral or even positive behavior from one's partner have for the health of the close relationship are straightforward. Again, taken individually, these biases may each seem small, however repeatedly putting a negative or positive spin on neutral information could have a large impact on relationships. More research is needed to confirms this idea.

Memory. Once social information has been attended to and interpreted, it is stored in (or lost to) memory. Memory is particularly important because of its underlying role in expectations that are carried into future interactions with the relationship partner or into similar social contexts. Social memory and expectancies are important in on-going social interaction because, as Neuberg (1996) summarized,

expectancy-confirmation processes can bias future interactions in the way information is gathered from the target, behavior toward the target, and through behavior elicited from the target. This seems particularly important in close relationships because which experiences out of the numerous interactions one has with a partner will determine expectancies. In addition to factors that we know to influence memory (such as the peak-end rule), approach and avoidance social motives and goals may influence the type of information recalled.

Strachman and Gable (2006) also tested memory in the study described above and found evidence for biases influenced by social motivation. Specifically, people with strong pre-existing avoidance social goals had better memory of negative behaviors enacted by an actor in the story. Not surprisingly, they also had a more negative evaluation of the social actors in the story. Strachman and Gable (2006) also experimentally manipulated participants' social goals for an upcoming interaction with a stranger. Those in the avoidance goal condition remembered more negative information about this stranger than those in the approach goal condition. These results suggest that social motivation can bias memory of social information, however again these studies focused on social interactions created in the laboratory and not existing close relationships. Whether these memory biases exist in long-term close relationships is a question for future research.

Weight of social information. Assuming that social information is attended to, interpreted in specific way, and remembered, how is that information then used making global evaluations. That is, a series of positive interactions in a marriage may be noticed, interpreted and remembered equally by both spouses. However, one spouse may deem these interactions as trivial in terms of her overall marital satisfaction whereas the other spouse may view them as the main component of his overall marital satisfaction. It is possible that approach and avoidance motivation systematically influences how social information is used in global evaluations. It follows from the model that approach social motivation will be positively correlated with the weight that the presence (or absence) of positive social information and interactions receives in global evaluations. And, avoidance social motivation should be positively correlated with the weight that is placed on the presence (or absence) of negative social information and

interactions when making global evaluations.

Updegraff, Gable, & Taylor (2004) examined this in the context of general approach and avoidance goals and positive and negative emotions. In both a laboratory study and a signal-contingent daily experience study, they found that high-approach participants (BAS) made satisfaction ratings that were more strongly tied to positive affect as compared to low-approach participants. Although this pattern has not yet been tested in the context of social relationships, the approach and avoidance social motivation model predicts that differences in motivation and goals should influence, for example, how different qualities of relationships (e.g., intimacy, trust) are weighted in overall satisfaction. Specifically, approach motives and goals should be positively correlated with outcomes such as passionate love, and avoidance motives and goals will be negatively correlated with outcomes such as security. Specifically, those high on approach motives and goals are likely to be satisfied in relationships that are characterized by incentives and those high on avoidance motives and goals are likely to be satisfied in relationships that are characterized by the absence of threats. Global evaluations of satisfaction are likely to be very important to relationship stability and decisions regarding staying or leaving a relationship.

Evaluation of Progress on Goals. One of the defining features a relationship is that it persists over time. Therefore, it is likely that individuals evaluate the progress they are making on their goals in those relationships over time. Carver and Scheier's (1982; 1990) Control-Process model predicts that an important element of affective experience is progress on goals. Specifically, their model posits that one's current level of goal attainment is compared to a standard; if progress exceeds the standard, positive affect is experienced; if progress falls short of the standard, negative affect is experienced; and if progress is equal to the standard, no affect is experienced. In terms of the focus of goals, the type of positive affect experienced upon success with avoidance goals (avoiding threat) is relief, and with approach goals (attaining incentive) is joy. The type of the negative affect experienced upon failure with avoidance goals (not avoiding threat) is anxiety, and with approach goals (not attaining incentive) is disappointment (see Carver, 2004; Higgins, 1997). It is likely that relationship quality will be a function of the emotional experience as a function of rate of progress on approach and avoidance goals in one's romantic

relationship.

Moreover, the cues for goal progress are likely to be different in approach and avoidance frameworks. For example, when someone has the goal of not being rejected by his partner, he is only one rebuff away from failure at any given time, regardless of how many accepting interactions he experiences with his partner. However, someone who has an approach goal of growing more intimate with his partner, he grows closer to his goals with each mutual disclosing interaction. We are not aware of any research that specifically examines goal progress in social relationships, but this is likely a fruitful topic for research.

Future Directions and Concluding Comments

Although previous research on motivation and goals (such as work on general motives or achievement goals) provides an excellent starting point for research on social motives and goals, there are aspects of interpersonal relationships that are unique and require special attention. The first characteristic of relationships is that, almost by definition, they exist over time. As such, the influence of motives and goals on relationship processes should be examined across time, in repeated interactions. For example, goals in a particular relationship might change with different experiences with the partner; repeated interaction that lack threats may lessen the importance of an avoidance goal that one has concerning her partner. The second feature that needs to be addressed, and has not been done adequately here, is the dyadic nature of relationship. Although motives and goal are mainly internal to the individual[1], unlike achievement goals, the ability to make progress on social goals is based partly on other people. The manner in which each individual's goals influence the interaction is in need of examination. Indeed, the complex interaction between the motives involved in a dyad, not to mention a family or a group, are potentially fruitful investigations. At the very least, the dyadic perspective is needed in the examination of social motivation, a perspective that motivation theorists have not yet taken. While there are many challenges ahead, work investigating the influence of approach and avoidance social motivation on social

[1] An exception to this would be shared goals; although the extent that shared goals are internalized by each individual in the relationship is likely to be different.

relationships has great potential to yielde useful and important insights into our understanding of both close relationships and individual motivation.

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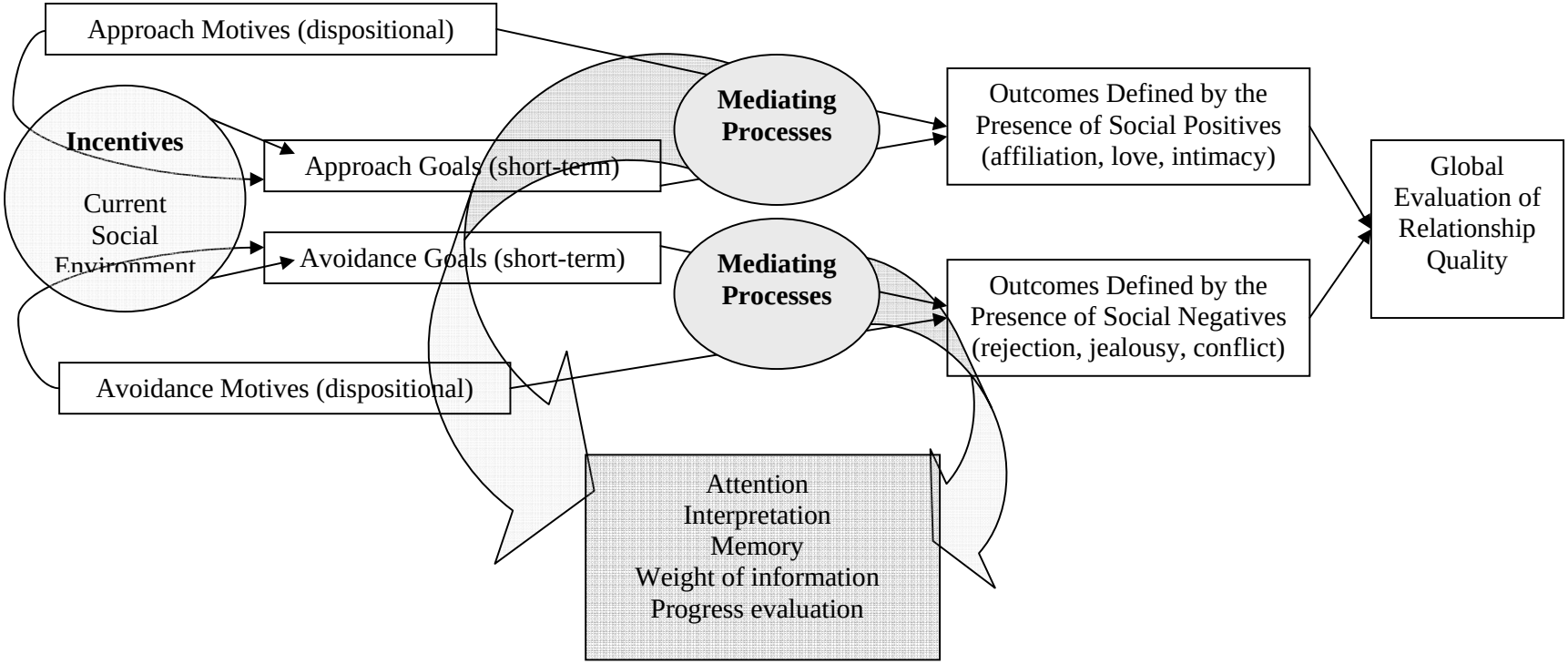
Figure Captions

Figure 1. An Approach-Avoidance Model of Social Motivation and Social Goals. Adapted from Gable & Berkman (in press).


Approach Motives (dispositional)
Incentives
Current
Social
Environment
Approach Goals (short-term)
Avoidance Goals (short-term)
Avoidance Motives (dispositional)
Mediating Processes
Mediating Processes
Outcomes Defined by the Presence of Social Positives (affiliation, love, intimacy)
Outcomes Defined by the Presence of Social Negatives (rejection, jealousy, conflict)
Global Evaluation of Relationship Quality
Attention
Interpretation
Memory
Weight of information
Progress evaluation